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CONTENTS

Empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions Giriraj Singh 5



e-GramSwaraj Ishita G. Tripathy 11



Good Governance at Grass-root Level Bhuwan Bhaskar 17

SVAMITVA Scheme for Providing Property Validation Dr. Namrata Singh Panwar 22



Women Empowerment Dr. Mahi Pal 26



2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Manjula Wadhwa 34

Water Management through Panchayats Dr. Jagdeep Saxena 40



Human Development through Panchayati Raj Institution Debabrata Samanta 46

Universal Health Coverage with Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres Dr. Manisha Verma 51

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The Government created the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2004 to look into all matters relating to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is looking after the ongoing process of decentralisation and local governance in the States.

The Centre time to time has strengthened the Panchayati Raj Institutions to ensure that the rural India is empowered and walk on the path of overall development. The vision of the government is to attain decentralised and participatory local self-government through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and its mission is empowerment, enablement and accountability of Panchayati Raj Institutions to ensure inclusive development with social justice, and efficient delivery of services.

To shed a light on the developments and initiatives related to Panchayati Raj system in the country, Kurukshetra this issue is based on the theme *Panchayati Raj*.

Our lead article *Empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions* says that the present focus of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is to enable the Panchayati Raj Institutions, PRIs, to attain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at Panchayat level to further enable the country to attain the SDGs at national level.

The article *e-GramSwaraj* touches upon the importance of E-governance in Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is expected to help in enhancing and redefining various socio-economic, environmental, technological aspects of community development. In this context, e-GramSwaraj has been a potent example of 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance'. Gram Swaraj or self-government is definitely an integral part of Aatma Nirbharata or self-reliance and e-GramSwaraj has a crucial role to play in that.

The author of the article *Good Governance at Grass-root Level* described Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as the most important and potent tools provided by the Indian Constitution to empower the democratic values on the grass-root level.

Article titled as *SVAMITVA Scheme for Providing Property Validation* says that India needed a solve which cannot only empower rural governance but also stand-alone farmers, and the answer to these woes came as the "SVAMITVA Scheme". It is and will be acting as the stepping stone in uplifting the rural economy of India.

The author of the article *Women Empowerment* writes that the Constitution has enabled women to be instrumental in deepening decentralised governance through PRIs. They are not only for preparing plans for economic development but also with social justice caring all marginalised groups in rural areas.

We hope that readers get updated after going through this issue of Kurukshetra.

Happy reading.

Empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions

Giriraj Singh

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is working towards making Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) an effective, efficient and transparent vehicle for local governance, social change and public service delivery mechanism meeting the aspirations of local population. The role of MoPR involves strengthening the administrative infrastructure, basic services etc. by leveraging technology and capacity building of the functionaries of Rural Local Bodies.

Panchayati Raj Institutions are the pillars of democracy. To strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions, the Central Government under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has made many efforts in the last eight years and in the upcoming time even more vigorous efforts will be made during the Amrit Kaal. One of the major steps taken so far is the implementation of the PESA Act. Through this act, we have established such a strong system in which traditional panchayats working in different parts of the country are recognised according to their rules and regulations. With the continuous efforts of our government, most of the states have implemented PESA Act and we are constantly encouraging those one or two states to implement it where it is yet to be implemented.

The vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister is that we have to make the Panchayats self-sustainable along with empowering them. It is our endeavor that the Panchayati Raj Institutions, by self-assessment of their needs, develop their own sources of revenue along with the funds of government schemes through public participation and implement the schemes according to the needs of the panchayats from those funds and continue to proceed on the path of progress.

In order to empower the Gram Panchayats through public participation, the most important link is to empower the Gram Sabhas, that is, to ensure the active and effective participation of the people in the Gram Sabhas. At least six gram sabhas should be organised throughout the year, which focus on the overall upliftment of youth, women, children, farmers etc. and all kinds of related schemes should be discussed, carried out, selected and approved in the said gram sabha. Regular



Union Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Shri Giriraj Singh

review of these schemes should also be done in these Gram Sabhas.

It is the constant endeavor of the Central Government that after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the Panchayati Raj Institutions should not only be empowered by the States in the field of 29 subjects allotted to them, but should also be made functional. Many states have made better efforts in this course. The Jammu and Kashmir Administration, especially the Honorable Lieutenant Governor of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, Shri Manoj Sinha deserves thanks for the serious efforts made in this direction. Similarly, other States/Union Territories should also go ahead and make concerted efforts for the empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

With 6.50 lakh villages and 65 per cent of population living in villages, India's development

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agenda is rural development. The architecture of Indian Panchayati Raj System, which has its roots in the long history and culture of our country, has been primarily designed to address this agenda. It also strengthens the foundation of democracy at grassroots level by ensuring social and political empowerment of the people of about 2.6 lakh Panchayats with 31.5 lakh elected representatives, out of which about 46 per cent are women.

This Panchayati Raj system had been assigned a constitutional status through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India. Part IX (Article 243) was added to the Constitution as a sequel to this Amendment providing three-tier system of Panchayats; devolution of powers and responsibilities to the Panchayats etc. It also provides wide representation to Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) which are the weaker sections of the society. Article 243G of the Constitution stipulates that Panchayats should plan for and implement schemes for local economic development and social justice.

Panchayats are primarily the responsibility of State Governments because “Local Government” is a State subject. Panchayats are set up and operate through the respective State Panchayati Raj Acts. The State legislatures are to consider the 29 subjects illustratively set out in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution for devolution to the Panchayats. The Eleventh Schedule covers a wide range of rural development agenda including agriculture, land improvement, land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, fisheries, social forestry, minor forest produce, small scale and cottage industries, rural housing, rural roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways, rural electrification, non-conventional energy sources, poverty alleviation programme, education, markets and fairs, health and sanitation, family welfare, women and child development, social welfare, public distribution system and maintenance of community assets.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj was created on 27th May, 2004 with the aim to make Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) an effective, efficient and transparent vehicle for local governance, social change and public service delivery mechanism meeting the aspirations of local population. The role of MoPR involves strengthening the

administrative infrastructure, basic services etc. by leveraging technology and capacity building of the functionaries of Rural Local Bodies.

Capacity Building of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

Since considerable amount of public money is now being spent through Panchayats, capacity building of elected representatives (ERs) and various functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is very much necessary. For this purpose, MoPR has been implementing schemes to fund the capacity building and training (CB&T) of the ERs. At present, it is implementing the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA). Since the inception of this scheme in 2018-19, 1.42 crore participants including ERs, Panchayat functionaries and other Stakeholder have been trained. During 2022-23 more than 33 lakh participants have been trained. An amount of Rs. 2149.09 crore has been spent under RGSA from 2018-19 to 2021-22 towards capacity building of Panchayats and during 2022-23 an amount of Rs. 610.05 crore has been spent.

Thematic Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)

As Panchayats are constitutionally mandated to prepare their developmental plan, the Ministry has been emphasising through special campaign, CB&T and orientation to prepare Panchayat Development Plan. During 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 around 2.51 lakh, 2.58 lakh and 2.58 lakh GPs or equivalent bodies respectively have prepared their GPDP.

The present focus of the MoPR is to enable the PRIs to attain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at Panchayat level and further enable the country to attain the SDGs at National level. To this end, the MoPR has taken a novel initiative of adopting thematic approach for localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) where 17 SDGs have been mapped into 9 themes for preparation of targeted developmental plan by pulling resources and converging activities of various schemes and programmes of Central and State Governments with the ‘whole of Government’ and ‘whole of society’ approach. These 9 themes are (i) “Poverty Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Village” that aims to create avenues of enhanced income level of the poor and to ensure eligible

beneficiaries covered under Social Protection Schemes and MGNREGA like employment oriented scheme, (ii) “Healthy Village” to ensure healthy lives and well being for all through health checkup, 100 per cent immunisation, institutional delivery, nutrition and early child care through ICDS etc., (iii) ‘Child-Friendly Village’ that strives to attain 100 per cent enrolment in the school, reduce drop-out ratio, quality education, 100 per cent immunisation of children, 100 per cent child labour free village, no child trafficking, protected environment from all kinds of violence against children etc., (iv) ‘Water Sufficient Village’ ensuring access to potable water facilities to every household, grey water treatment and purification, address groundwater depletion, arsenic contamination, rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge etc., (v) ‘Clean and Green Village’ aiming for 100 per cent ODF villages, solid and liquid waste management, shift to renewable source of energy, enhanced green cover, conservation of biodiversity etc., (vi) ‘Village with Self-Sufficient Infrastructure’ with the objective of providing basic infrastructure in villages such as GP Bhawan, AWC, Schools, Health Centre, CSC, separate toilets for boys and girls in schools with water, all- weather roads, solar street lights etc., (vii) ‘Socially Just and Socially Secured Villages’ for improving living standards of the BPL, disabled, destitute, socially disadvantaged groups, social protection through various schemes to the eligible, infrastructure facilities for person with disability etc., (viii) ‘Village with Good Governance’ ensuring better public delivery, regular ward/ Mahila/Bal-Balika/Gram Sabha, functional standing committees, involvement of SHG/ village committees in localisation of SDGs, coordination and convergence among various institutions/stakeholders for preparation of GPDP and (ix) ‘Women Friendly Village’ to ensure 100 per cent immunisation of pregnant women, 100 per cent institutional delivery, 100 per cent ANC/ PNC, reduce crimes against women and girls, participation of women in socio-political, economic activities etc.

Provision of Basic Services through the Finance Commission Funding

Panchayats provide basic services to the rural population such as supply of drinking water, maintenance of sanitation and ODF status etc. They also maintain water sources, village wells, tanks

and pumps, street lighting and drainage system. To carry out such activities, Panchayats receive funds through the Central Finance Commission, State Finance Commission and a number of Centrally sponsored schemes. Fifteenth Finance Commission has recommended Rs. 2,36,805.00 crore for the award period 2021-2026. Through the recommendations of State Finance Commissions too, Panchayats receive approximately Rs. 30,000 crore annually. Through the various Centrally sponsored schemes, it is estimated Rs. 1.5 to 2.00 lakh crore reach Panchayats annually.

National Panchayat Awards

To encourage competitive spirit among PRIs and States/UTs, awards including financial incentives are given under the Incentivisation of Panchayats scheme to best performing Panchayats and States/UTs in recognition of their good work for improving delivery of services and public goods. The National Panchayat Awards have been revamped w.e.f. year 2022 aligning with nine LSDG themes. The revamped National Panchayat Awards will enable theme-wise ranking of all Gram Panchayats and also Block Panchayats and District Panchayats on the basis of performance of their Gram Panchayats. This would create a baseline for the PRIs to assess their status under each of the LSDG theme and enable them to achieve SDGs in a phased manner through graduated planning by the year 2030. More than 2.00 lakh Panchayats have participated in this revamped thematic award competition in 2022-23. The awards will be conferred under the categories of Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar for the performance under individual LSDG theme and Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar for the aggregate performance under all 9 LSDG themes. Besides, other special categories of awards have been instituted to encourage the Panchayats to work in the field of energy self-sufficiency zero net carbon emission in the Panchayats.

e-Governance and ICT Initiatives

In the year 2020, in order to strengthen e-Governance in the PRIs and to eventually ease the complexities involved in e-Governance Applications, a Simplified Work Based Accounting Application, e-Gram SWARAJ, was launched on April 24, 2020. To ensure better financial

management of Panchayats for enhancing transparency and accountability in maintenance of accounts, Ministry has integrated e-GramSwaraj with PFMS. e-GramSwaraj PFMS Interface (eGSPI) is one of its kind for Gram Panchayats to make real time payments to vendors/service providers. All transactions are secured and payment vouchers are created using 2 factor authentications.

Over 2.55 Lakh Gram Panchayats or equivalent bodies have prepared their Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP) for 2022-23 with 2.78 Lakh Panchayats on boarded GSPI with 90 per cent of the Gram Panchayats successfully making online transactions using eGSPI. Transactions to the tune of Rs. 1.2 Lakh Crores have been made through eGSPI, a commendable achievement in the direction of transparency and efficient financial transactions.

Now, the e-Gram SWARAJ is also being integrated with Government eMarket place (GeM) to enable seamless procurement and accounting experience to the Panchayats. The pilot project for this has already been tested by 10 States.

Ministry is also providing an online system to show the list of the beneficiary of various Central Government Schemes on e-Gram SWARAJ. As on date, data from 7 Ministries and 18 schemes with details of around 17 crore beneficiaries have been ported.

AuditOnline Application has been developed to allow online audit of Panchayat accounts and to

enhance transparency and accountability in audit. For the audit period 2019-20, all the States except Arunachal Pradesh, have completed the target of auditing 25 per cent Gram Panchayats. About 1.95 lakh Audit Reports have been generated for the Audit Period 2020-21.

Citizen Charter Campaign

The Ministry carried out the Citizen Charter campaign under the aegis of Meri Panchayat, Mera Adhikaar- Jan Sevaayein Hamare Dwaar from 1st July - 30th September, 2021 with an intent to making the Panchayats and their elected representatives directly accountable to the people. As on date, about 2.15 Lakh Gram Panchayats across 30 States/ UTs have now finalised their Citizen Charter, offering 952 Services spanning various sectors viz. Health & Family Welfare, Drinking Water & Sanitation, Public Welfare, Employment etc.

Common Service Centers (CSCs)

The primary objective of CSC is to act as single access points for delivery of all digital services in Gram Panchayats and to generate opportunities of employment by promoting rural entrepreneurship. Around 52,409 CSCs have been co-located with Panchayat Bhawans as on date.

SVAMITVA Scheme

The scheme SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village



Areas) is implemented by MoPR to provide the 'Record of Rights' to village household owners possessing houses in inhabited rural areas in villages and issuance of property cards to the property owners. As on 1st March 2023, drone survey has been completed in 2.32 lakh villages and saturated/completed in the states of UT of Lakshadweep, Delhi, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and Daman & Diu, and state of Madhya Pradesh. So far, 1.20 crore property Cards have been prepared for nearly 70 thousand villages. Property Cards of all the inhabited villages of Haryana, Uttarakhand, Puducherry, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Goa have been prepared. The record of right through property cards is going to prove a big game changer in asset monetization in the rural areas besides enabling the Panchayats in assessing and collecting property tax in the near future in their endeavor to enhance their own sources of revenue.

Social Media Activities

Media activities through various means are proving very beneficial towards the CB&T of the PRIs. In order to further enhance the rural outreach through effective communication system, the MoPR operates various social media accounts to facilitate two-way communication with the major target segments- Panchayats across the country. At present more than 650 videos are available on YouTube Channel of the Ministry (@MinistryOfPanchayatiRaj). The Ministry is active on Twitter (@mopr_goi) and Facebook (@MinistryOfPanchayatiRaj) too by uploading about 140 tweets/ posts per month on the aforesaid platforms. The average impression on tweets, posts, videos published on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are more than 7.72 lakh, 7.27 lakh and 1.12 lakh respectively.

What Do We Seek to Achieve During the Amrit Kaal?

1. Vibrant Gram Sabha to realise the dreams of 'Gram Swaraj' and 'Power to the People'.
2. Adequate devolution of Funds, Functions and Functionaries (3Fs) to the Panchayats through States to be able to deliver the essential services and to attain localization of Sustainable Development Goals.

3. Provision of Panchayat-Secretariat/Gram Sachivalaya to all Panchayats and presence of Line Departments in Panchayat-Secretariat/Gram Sachivalaya.
4. Ensuring various Financial Instruments to the Panchayats including market borrowing to be able to carry out various developmental works.
5. Strengthening of Statutory Standing Committees of Gram Panchayats with a view to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
6. Bridging the Rural – Urban divide and transforming Panchayats as new age Local Self Government for effective service delivery to its citizens thereby ensuring Ease of Living and Quality of Life.
7. Master Spatial Plans for Gram Panchayats clearly demarcating areas for agriculture, residence, markets, parks, water bodies, industries, institutional areas such as bank, post-office, Anganwadi, PHC, school etc. so that their development on the lines of cities may take place.
8. Adequate Own Sources of Revenue (OSR) for the GPs making them self-reliant/Self-sustained.
9. Effective Disaster Management Plan for the GPs which lays the framework for national disaster response in rural areas.
10. Energy empowerment of villages through Gram Urja Swaraj.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has made remarkable progress in the direction of its goal for the empowerment and self-sustainability of Panchayati Raj Institutions by converging the plans of other Ministries and with the active public participation under the leadership of the local people's representatives with the States. During the period of Azadi ka Amrit Kal, we are moving fast in the direction of Panchayat with education, Panchayat with employment, clean Panchayat, green Panchayat and self-sustainable Panchayat etc. and gradually we will achieve these goals and according to the resolution of Hon'ble Prime Minister, Panchayati Raj Institutions will be made strengthened and self-sustainable. ■

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e-GramSwaraj

Ishita G. Tripathy

The empowering effects of today's information technology and communication for governance have prompted nations of the world to increasingly adopt processes and practices of electronic governance. The village Panchayats, local self-governments in the Panchayat Raj System of India, are no exception.

The empowering effects of today's information technology and communication for governance have prompted nations of the world to increasingly adopt processes and practices of electronic governance. The village panchayats, local self-governments in the panchayat raj system of India, are no exception. The panchayats are expected to deliver timely, hassle-free, affordable and door-step public services while ensuring transparency and accountability. Backed by the provisions in the Indian Constitution, the three-tier structure of the panchayati Raj, at the village

and the district, and an intermediate level between them, is to effectively and efficiently carry out the tasks as assigned in article 243G of the Indian Constitution. The objective is to achieve the greater goal of maximising public welfare by following a bottom up approach in planning, prioritisation of needs and execution of activities at the community level.

With the objective of empowering village panchayats to effectively function as units of self-government, certain essential features were enshrined in the Indian Constitution through the 73rd Amendment enacted in 1992. The amendment

E-governance in Panchayati Raj Institutions is expected to help in enhancing and redefining various socio-economic, environmental, technological aspects of community development. In this context, eGramSwaraj has been a potent example of 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance'. Gram Swaraj or self-government is definitely an integral part of Aatma Nirbharata or self-reliance and eGramSwaraj has a crucial role to play in that.



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defined the powers, authority and responsibilities of panchayats by providing for devolution of powers with respect to preparation of plans for economic development and social justice; implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice; powers to impose taxes; maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and the auditing of such accounts, etc. In this context, the eleventh schedule of the Indian Constitution contains 29 activities on which panchayats are to implement schemes for their self-development and self-sustenance.

Panchayats and E-Governance

It is imperative to ensure smart and good governance right at the community level through the panchayati Raj Institutions and for this purpose the mantra of 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance' works well. This calls for adopting improved governance practices, including e-governance, in administering community level activities. E-governance in Panchayati Raj Institutions is expected to help in enhancing and redefining various socio-economic, environmental, technological aspects of community development. In this context, eGramSwaraj has been a potent example of 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance'. Propelled by the ICT revolution, it serves the multiple objectives of effective decentralisation, enhancing accountability of the money used for public service, optimum utilisation of scarce resources, and raising public awareness about various aspects of local governance processes and practices.

Good Governance through e-GramSwaraj

The roots of self-government go back to ancient Greek history, specifically, the capital city of Athens. A number of countries took steps to promote governance through local bodies so that services could be delivered at doorstep and leakages and middlemen would be wiped out from the service supply chain. While the European Charter of local self-government assessed the situation of local and regional democracy in its member states to strengthen and monitor developments, the French Government in 1982 enacted a law wherein elected regional councils were empowered to elect their executive. Local self-governments are mentioned in the Belgian and Finnish constitutions. In India, the Government of India Act of 1935

provided for devolution of powers to the provinces. Subsequently, committees such as those led by Balwant Mehta, Ashok Mehta, G.V.K. Rao and L.M. Singhvi, recommended democratic decentralisation in independent India. Formulation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans are not only for the development of local areas, but also important in ensuring that the development is sustainable. In fact, such plans have been inextricably linked with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been working with State Governments for localising Sustainable Development Goals in Gram Panchayats .

United Nations lays down eight characteristics of good governance, viz. (i) participatory, (ii) consensus-oriented, (iii) accountable, (iv) transparent, (v) responsive, (vi) effective and efficient, (vii) equitable and inclusive and (viii) following the rule of law. In this context, it is of utmost importance to ensure making the community digitally inclusive and the society empowered where large sections of the rural population are able to benefit from new technologies by accessing and sharing information and services without any constraint and contribute in the participatory development process successfully.

With the objective of strengthening digitalisation in panchayats, improving grass-root governance, empowering rural citizens and ensuring transparency and accountability, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj had launched eGramSwaraj, a work-based comprehensive application for panchayati raj institutions in 2020 on National Panchayati Day, i.e. on 24th April, 2020. This application is mandated to facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation of works taken up in Gram Panchayats. It enables uploading of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP) and financial and physical progress reports by Gram Panchayats. Being integrated with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), it is able to facilitate online payments to material vendors and service providers. The linkage with PFMS ensures easy reporting and timely tracking of Gram Panchayat's activities. Effectively, the single platform is all-encompassing as it covers all aspects of Panchayat functioning viz. planning, budgeting, accounting, monitoring, asset management, etc.

Progress of eGramSwaraj

Technology is rapidly becoming one of the cornerstones of the governance efficiency of Panchayati Raj Institutions. There are 6,62,841 villages in the country, for which there are 2,71,770 Gram Panchayats (GPs)/ Rural Local Bodies (RLBs). For the financial year 2022-23, as on 05.02.2023,

and in 2021-22 as many as 2.56 lakh GDPDs were uploaded, while in 2020-21, the corresponding figures were 2.43 lakh. The State-wise details of the number of Gram Panchayats in the country that have prepared their development plans, number of activities planned and number of activities completed during the current financial year 2022-23, till 05.02.2023 is given in Table-1.

**Gram Panchayat Development Plan- State-wise details for Financial Year 2022-23
(as on 05.02.2023)**

S. No.	States/UTs	Total Gram Panchayats including Traditional Local Bodies	GPDP Uploaded	Activity Planned	Activity Completed
1	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	70	70	5,701	0
2	Andhra Pradesh	13,325	13,323	1,53,744	0
3	Arunachal Pradesh	2,108	1,955	11,029	0
4	Assam	2,663	2,191	22,491	0
5	Bihar	8,174	8,067	4,26,351	74
6	Chhattisgarh	11,659	11,646	2,39,999	26
7	Goa	191	190	4,648	0
8	Gujarat	14,365	14,200	1,40,899	0
9	Haryana	6,229	6,225	42,132	63
10	Himachal Pradesh	3,615	3,602	42,706	6
11	Jammu & Kashmir	4,291	4,289	67,439	0
12	Jharkhand	4,345	4,333	1,58,982	4
13	Karnataka	5,958	5,789	1,93,892	14
14	Kerala	941	941	23,696	7
15	Ladakh	193	193	4,059	0
16	Lakshadweep	10	0	0	0
17	Madhya Pradesh	23,032	22,884	5,13,475	79
18	Maharashtra	27,897	27,828	5,03,456	12
19	Manipur	3,812	758	28,782	0
20	Meghalaya	6,811	0	0	0
21	Mizoram	834	763	2,324	0
22	Nagaland	1,292	0	0	0
23	Odisha	6,794	6,749	1,86,740	294
24	Punjab	13,234	13,220	56,114	0
25	Rajasthan	11,303	11,302	5,59,112	239
26	Sikkim	198	179	3,977	0
27	Tamil Nadu	12,525	12,386	63,140	0
28	Telangana	12,769	12,756	1,71,153	30
29	Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	38	38	753	0
30	Tripura	1,178	1,176	1,06,039	1
31	Uttarakhand	7,814	7,783	91,818	5
32	Uttar Pradesh	58,184	58,040	27,95,415	98
33	West Bengal	3,339	3,052	2,75,798	30
	Total	2,69,191	2,55,928	68,95,864	982

Source: Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 719 answered on 08.02.2023

The Gram Panchayats are constitutionally mandated to examine and review available resources with the community and accordingly, prepare GDPs for ensuring economic development and social justice.

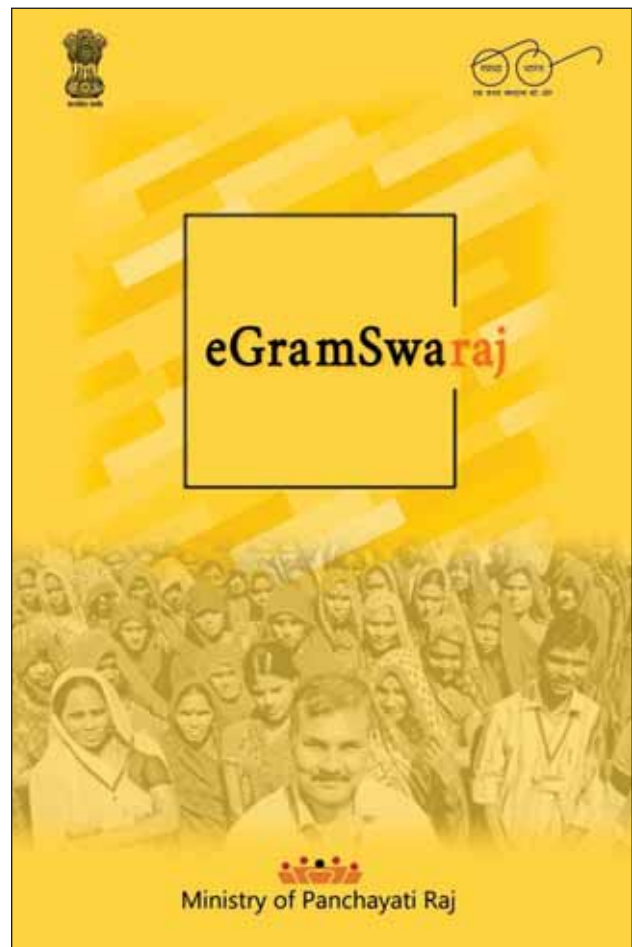
The pandemic has made it amply clear that moving to an online system is definitively possible, and in certain scenarios is a necessity. Emanating from this, is the renewed vigour with which the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has devised an online audit application for Panchayat accounts, viz. <https://auditonline.gov.in> for maintaining audit records, creating audit inquiries, drafting local audit reports and audit paras. Panchayats are a State subject and the Central Government supplements the efforts of the States. For example, through schemes such as Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan and its revamped version introduced in 2022-23, the Central Government helps in the capacity building and training of elected representatives/functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions; provides financial incentives to best performing Panchayats; and through Mission Mode Project on e-Panchayats strives towards making Panchayati Raj Institutions more transparent, accountable and effective.

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

The Gram Panchayats are constitutionally mandated to examine and review available resources with the community and accordingly, prepare GDPs for ensuring economic development and social justice. GDP should be comprehensive and should be based on a participatory approach involving the community particularly Gram Sabha. The challenge before the Panchayats is to ensure rightful documentation of the plan and after due consultations with the experts in the field. The GDPs also need to identify and review the available schemes and the resources attached to the schemes for appropriate convergence. There is a need to ensure feasible convergence with schemes and programmes of all related Central Ministries / Line Departments related to 29 subjects listed for PRIs in the Eleventh Schedule

of the Constitution. Appropriate convergence would ensure that Panchayats' active engagement in the effective implementation of Government's schemes and missions right at the grass-roots.

For Gram Panchayats to carry out their functions unhindered, some basic requirements need to be met. Out of 2,71,770 Gram Panchayats across the country, 51,508 do not have their own buildings. A basic pre-requisite for eGramSwaraj is the availability of internet connectivity. The Output-Outcome Monitoring Framework captures parameters such as target for connecting Gram Panchayats with high-speed broadband/through optical fibre/radio/satellite, etc. The targets for 2021-22 to 2023-24 were 20,000; 22,000 and 17,500, respectively. Encouraging people to adopt digital means is itself a challenge which needs rolling out of a massive awareness generation programme. Issues such as content availability, information security, information privacy, integrated service delivery, etc. need to



be addressed. Further, the devolution of powers to Panchayats across States needs to be made uniform. Adequate decentralisation is dependent on the adequate and timely availability of funds at the last mile, hence, smoothening resource flow upto the Panchayat's last unit would support the e-initiatives of the government.

Common Service Centres (CSC) were started to propel e-governance in the country and the aim of each CSC was to cover at least six villages across rural India and provide Government-to-Citizen (G2C) e-Services such as education, health, telemedicine, banking and finance, other private services, by creating the physical service delivery ICT infrastructure. Convergence of CSC with eGramSwaraj will be another bolstered step towards e-governance.

Concluding Remarks

Awareness generation and training of all stakeholders involved are essential so that eGramSwaraj meets its objectives effectively and efficiently. The importance of fully integrating eGramSwaraj with Government eMarketplace (GeM) cannot be overemphasised. By reaching out to the grassroots, eGramSwaraj is transforming rural India and strengthening the foundation of eGovernance, besides setting new standards of effective decentralisation. Along with this,

continuous feedback from stakeholders is a must so that the system evolves into a robust one and also is dynamic enough to incorporate changes, whenever required. The success of Gram Panchayat Development Plans rests on the accurate identification of the activities, participatory approach, and effective implementation. For this to be successful, all line Departments need to be in sync.

Self-governance is the foundation of democracy, which underscores its significance in India, which is the largest democracy in the world. Gram Swaraj or self-government is definitely an integral part of Aatma Nirbharata or self-reliance and eGramSwaraj has a crucial role to play in that. The e-GramSwaraj is potent enough to significantly change how the local self-governments function both internally and outside. The e-self-government not only improves public service delivery quality, but also it acts as a reform tool for governance transformation. The participatory nature brings with it higher responsibilities and enhanced responsiveness. Considering the Digital India push of the Government; and with the surge in information technology usage in Panchayats, the Panchayati Raj Institutions are going to see a beneficial and quick transformation of their businesses and delivery of mandated services with a human touch. ■





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Good Governance at Grass-root Level

Bhuwan Bhaskar

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the most important and potent tools provided by the Indian Constitution to empower the democratic values on the grass-root level. These institutions make sure that the weaker sections of the society get their due in the socio-economic development process. Moreover, Panchayati Raj devolves the planning power to the beneficiaries themselves which in turn, ensures the optimum use of public resources in favor of the rural population.

India is a unique country in many ways, and this has been reiterated by noted scholars from across the globe, time and again. So whenever the growth model of the country is debated, it is strongly argued that the development rationale of this country should not be thought of and planned in the formats defined and formulated by Western world under the influence of its own circumstances. In this context, a number of references could be drawn in favor of, and against the complex structure of socio-economic and political system that the architects of post-independence modern India successfully developed over the years. Our parliamentary system seems to be influenced by the British political system. But, not the same could be said about the most primary unit of our democratic system – that is village level governance model. This model is called Panchayati Raj governance system, which is structured in 3-layers. Part IX of the Indian Constitution is the section of the Constitution relating to the Panchayats. It stipulates that in States or Union Territories with more than two million inhabitants there are three levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs):

1. the Gram Panchayats (GP) at village level

2. the Mandal Parishad or Block Samiti or Panchayat Samiti at block level, and
3. the Zila Parishad (ZP) at district level.

Rural Governance System: Indian Context

PRI in its modern avatar was introduced in India through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 to build democracy at the grass roots level and was entrusted with the task of rural development in the country. But, roots of this model of governance can be traced back to many centuries in the Indian history. As far back as in Rig Veda, Sabha, Samiti and Vidatha were mentioned as the units of local self-units. As per the details of these powerful units, the contemporary kings needed to take approval from these units in many instances. In Ramayan, the village level unit of governance used to be called as Janpad, while there used to be a caste panchayat all across the kingdom each of them was represented in the council of ministers in the king's court by one elected person. In later periods, 'Shanti Parva' in Mahabharata, Manu Smriti and Kautilya's Arthshastra also had references of rural units of governance in contemporary times. The history of rural governance in India remained strong in almost all the time periods till around 5th century AD when the Gupta dynasty fell down.



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Central power system weakened and so did the local system of governance. Later in dynasties like Delhi Sultanate, Mughal empire, rural governance system was reinstated to some extent.

Panchayati Raj in British India

Panchayati Raj Institutions found their modern form mostly in British Raj when in 1870 Mayo resolution was brought into. Through this resolution, local institutions were bestowed with more power and their scope of functioning was also enhanced. The Mayo resolution was in fact, promulgated as a result of the first independence war of 1857. The objective was to decentralise the taxation system to grass root levels. Mayo resolution was followed up by democratic framework of these institutions through Lord Rippon's laws in 1882. Then in 1907, for the first time in British India, the need of panchayats on village level was recognised by a Royal Commission chaired by CEH Hobhouse. In next some decades many more laws were passed to strengthen the identity and authority of village panchayats.

Mahatma Gandhi was a fierce proponent of the idea of Panchayati Raj. He strongly pleaded for decentralisation of powers. He viewed independence of India as a whole to begin at the villages and wanted every village to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs. But, there were many counter views also. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar himself was opposed to the idea of panchayati raj. He believed that the villages represented regressive India, a source of oppression. He argued against panchayats as he was apprehensive about the continuation of caste hegemony. Further, he opined that villages in India were caste-ridden and had little prospects of success as institutions of self-government. As a resultant of these debates, panchayats could find a mention only in Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution initially.

Panchayati Raj in Independent India

Panchayati Raj being a part of directive principles was never got a standard structure on pan-India basis. But, some states started implementing it under different names and concepts at local levels. In 1952, Community Development Programs (CDPs) were started on national level, but it could not cut much ice. To understand the reasons of its

failure, a committee headed by Balwant Rai Mehta was constituted in 1957. This committee concluded that CDP was not able to achieve its objectives because of the lack of public participation in it. So, the Mehta committee recommended the formation of 3-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) – Gram Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zilla Parishad at the district level. After that, multiple committees were formed on the issue of local level governance which made dozens of recommendations. Some or other parts of these recommendations got inserted in the legislation and the modern form of PRIs started taking structure. Then in September 1991, a comprehensive amendment was introduced in the form of the Constitution 72nd Amendment Bill. Later 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments together paved the way of local self-governance in rural and urban India. The 73rd Amendment actually added Part IX titled “The Panchayats”.

Panchayat is constituted on the basis of Gram Sabha – the basic unit on village level – where all the adult members are registered as voters. Article 243 of the Constitution deals with the process and structure of the constitution of PRIs. According to the article 243B, the panchayats function at the level of village, intermediate block/taluk/mandal and district except in the States where the population is below 20 lakhs. Article 243C (2) states that all the seats of a panchayat needs to be filled by direct election. Article 243D deals with the reservation in panchayats.

Panchayati Raj : A tool for Empowering Weaker Sections

According to the 2019 records, there are 6614 block panchayats, 630 zilla panchayats and 253163 gram panchayats. PRIs have played a significant role in the political empowerment of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments required that no less than one-third of the total seats in local bodies should be reserved for women. At 1.4 million, India has the most women in elected positions. Studies show that greater female representation in local level government system has ensured reporting of crime against women at a greater number. Also, districts with female sarpanchs have made significantly greater investment in basic amenities like drinking water and public goods. Along with women, it has also been playing an important role in strengthening

weaker social groups like ST/ST and OBC. Seats and sarpanch/pradhan positions are reserved for SC/ST and OBC candidates. By giving representation to these deprived sections of society, PRIs have cemented the foundation of Indian democracy.

Governance by People for People

Gram Panchayat Institutions are the primary entities which take care of all the basic needs of the public. Maintaining water sources, village wells, tanks and pumps, street lighting and drainage system – all come in the purview of gram panchayat. PRIs being run by the elected representatives of the village only can always identify the problems at the grass root levels more efficiently, and thus reduce burden from the State administration. PRIs have 3 sources of funding: grants received from the local bodies, funds from the centrally-sponsored schemes and funds received by the state governments on the advice of State Finance Commissions. Although, PRIs are governed independently, the rules of their governance are formed by the state government.

There are two categories of work that PRIs are supposed to do. One is mandatory category and the other is optional. Optional set of work depends upon the available resources with a PRI. Here are some works that are optional for panchayati raj: establishment of reproduction centers for animals, promoting agriculture, plantation alongside the roads, welfare of new born and mother etc. Under mandatory category comes following set of works: primary health, construction of public wells, construction of public toilets, social health and primary and adult education, vaccination, irrigation, supply of potable water, rural electrification, hygiene, maintenance of public pathways etc. In the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the scope of work for PRIs was further enhanced to include services at the time of natural calamity, preparing annual development plan for panchayat area, implementation and review of poverty alleviation programs, annual budget and removing encroachment from public land. Not only administrative works, but also in managing the law and order situation, panchayats are playing commendable role. Many villages are too distant from police stations and for any villager to seek resort to police against any petty crime could be challenging. In those areas, panchayats take action against the culprit and try to create an atmosphere

of justice. In some states, Gram Panchayats also take up tasks related to sustainable energy sources, public distribution system etc. They are empowered by State Legislatures.

In short, the PRIs are conceptualised in a way that the bottom up approach could be thought of for development at local level. The idea is to get the plans ready on need basis by the same people who have to use the facilities. So, village panchayats make plans of development with people's participation. These plans are placed together with similar plans prepared by the intermediate and district panchayats. All these facts and provisions point to only one conclusion that panchayati raj institutions in their structure and conception, are meant to be a backbone of successful and good governance system.

Acknowledging the crucial role Panchayati Raj Institutions can play in the implementation of successful and good governance, the Narendra Modi-government has launched several schemes aimed at strengthening and empowering Panchayati Raj institutions in the country. Some of these schemes are:

Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)–

A special campaign called “Gram Panchayat Development Plan” was launched with a mandate to prepare the Panchayat Development Plan (PDP) for economic development and social justice utilising the resources available to them. The PDP planning process had to be comprehensive and based on participatory process which involves the full convergence with Schemes of all related Central Ministries / Line Departments related to 29 subjects enlisted in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) should be comprehensive and based on participatory process involving the community particularly Gram Sabha, and will be in convergence with schemes of all related Central Ministries / Line Departments related to 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. The convergence assumes greater significance in view of the fact that Panchayats can play an important role for effective implementation of flagship schemes on subjects of National Importance for transformation of rural India.

This Ministry of Finance took the initiative of preparing model guidelines for GPDP and

circulated the same to all the States where part IX of Constitution is applicable. Based upon these model guidelines, all the states notified their State specific guidelines for GPDP. The GPDPs were being formulated and implemented by States since then, as per their respective State Guidelines. Further, in consonance with the emerging needs of holistic development of the villages, the Ministry has revised the model GPDP guidelines issued during 2015. The revised guidelines in 2018 have been put on the website of the Ministry and have been shared with States for amplifying their respective guidelines.

Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)– With an objective to bring people propelled development at the ground level, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA), the ‘Transformation of Aspirational Districts’ program that aims to quickly and effectively transform selected districts in 2018. These districts were selected on parameters like poverty, public health, nutrition, education, gender, sanitation, drinking water, livelihood generation which are in sync with Social Development Goals (SDGs) and fall within the realm of Panchayats. RGSA was proposed to be implemented as a core Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for four years viz., from 2018-19 to 2021-22 with State and Central shares. The sharing ratio for the State components would be in the ratio of 60:40 except NE and Hilly States, where the Central and State Ratio had to be 90:10. For all UTs, the Central share would be 100 per cent. RGSA enables Panchayats to function effectively to achieve SDGs and other development objectives that require significant Capacity building efforts.

SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages And Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas)– On Panchayati Raj Diwas (April 24th) in 2020, the Prime Minister launched ‘SVAMITVA Yojana’ or Ownership Scheme to map residential land ownership in the rural sector using modern technology like the use of drones. The scheme aims to revolutionise property record maintenance in India. It aims to provide rural people with the right to document their residential properties so that they can use their property for economic purposes. The scheme is for surveying the land parcels in rural inhabited area using Drone technology. The survey shall cover all the 6.62 lakh villages across the country in a phase wise manner

over the period 2020 -2025.

e-Panchayat– The e-Panchayat scheme aims to bring transparency and efficiency to the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions through the use of technology. It provides a platform for online reporting, monitoring, and management of Panchayat activities.

Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Yojana (DDUPSY)– The DDUPSY scheme was launched in 2014 to strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions by providing them with the necessary resources and capabilities to undertake their constitutional duties. The scheme aims to empower Panchayati Raj institutions to undertake planning, implementation, and monitoring of development programs.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan– The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, launched in 2014, aims to make India clean and open-defecation free. The scheme focuses on creating a culture of cleanliness and promoting the use of toilets in rural areas. Panchayati Raj institutions play a crucial role in the implementation of the scheme at the grassroots level.

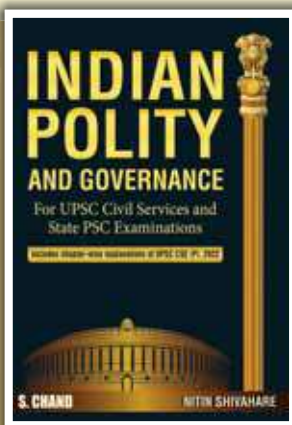
With the help of these schemes PRIs are aimed at strengthening the Panchayati Raj system in India and empowering local communities to participate in the development process to achieve the constitutional goal of successful governance at grass-root level. ■



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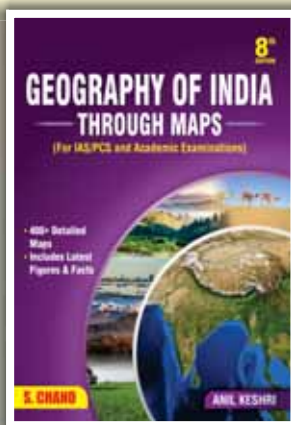
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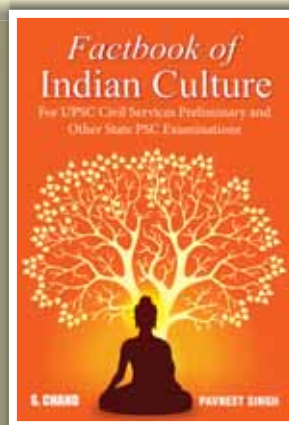
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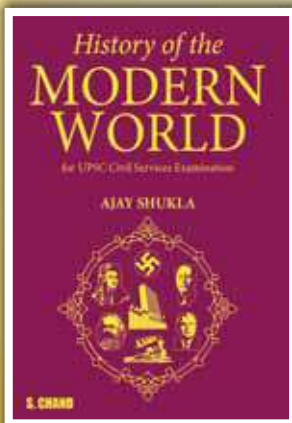
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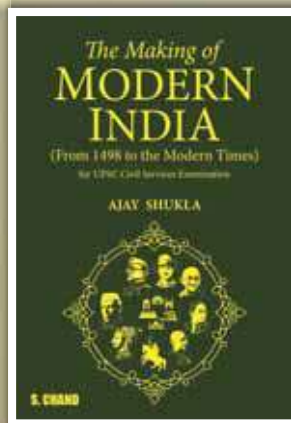
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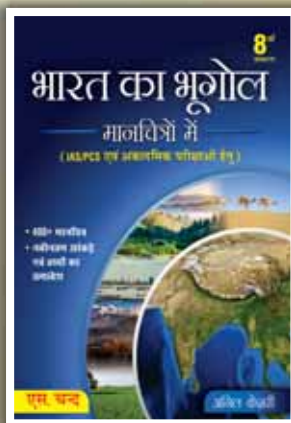
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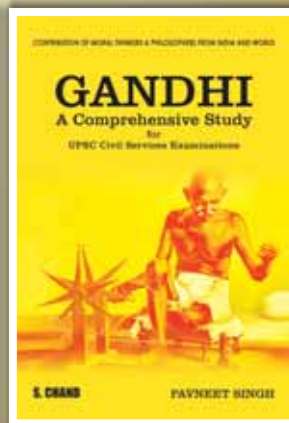
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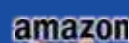
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SVAMITVA Scheme for Providing Property Validation

Dr. Namrata Singh Panwar

Rural India which still holds more than 60 per cent of the population is governed by the Gram Panchayats which do not have any buoyant source of income. Moreover, rural residents are not able to monetise their residential assets and land due to obscure land records and ambiguous land ownership documents. Therefore, India needed a solution which cannot only empower rural governance but also stand-alone farmers, and the answer to these woes came as the “SVAMITVA Scheme”. It is and will be acting as the stepping stone in uplifting the rural economy of India.

The one thing which is taught to every business or economics student is that there are four factors of production—Land, Labor, Capital, and Entrepreneur. Each of these, factors of production holds a significant role in the progress of the nation. Land, which is an immobile factor, is important because it is the basis of production for any business be it the manufacturing or service sector. Land can also be used as an instrument to obtain credit from

financial institutions. The usage of land parcels as collateral for loans is one of the significant modes through which any individual can access secure credit. In around, 50 per cent of the total retail loans and more than 80 per cent of the total agricultural loans, land has been used as collateral (Reserve Bank of India, 2014). But, the economy is not able to harness the full potential of land due to inaccurate land records and ambiguous land ownership details. The absence of quality land records especially



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affects the ability of marginal farmers to gain access to credit from formal institutions (Reserve Bank of India, 2015), suppressing a significant channel of credit and capital to the agricultural sector. This impacts the economic prospects of poor farmers and consequently the agrarian sector as a whole (World Bank, 2007). Apart from it, it hinders infrastructure projects and overall, ease of doing business in India.

Therefore, to resolve this issue at least at the village level, the government of India has launched the “SVAMITVA Scheme”. It aims to provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India, engaging the latest drone surveying technology, for demarcating the inhabitant (Abadi) land in rural areas. It has been decades since the survey of rural land for Record of Rights (RoRs) has been last completed and in many states, the survey of Abadi land in villages has never happened. Thus, to provide clear ownership of rural land, this scheme is initiated by the Government of India.

Need of the Scheme

The unclear property claims have historically created lots of distress and trouble not only for the people of India but also for its economy. The effects of poor land record management, land disputes, and ambiguous right to property have some far-reaching consequences and some of them are described below:

- According to the census 2011, India has 6,40,867 villages. Most villages were surveyed and cadastral maps were prepared at 1:4,000 to 1:10,000 scales during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The view of widespread development, there is a high need to update these maps and link them to RoRs.
- Land disputes have a severe impact on the growth of the nation. India loses nearly 1.3 per cent of economic growth annually as a result of disputed land titles (Mckinsey Global Institute, 2001)
- Due to litigation-related delays, several projects linked with land become dysfunctional. A report has revealed that due to the high incidence of conflicts related to land in India, an investment worth Rs. 19.7 trillion has been affected (Land Conflict Watch, 2020).

- Land-related disputes are also a heavy burden on the judiciary of the nation. Land-related disputes account for two-thirds of all pending court cases in the country and on average take 20 years to be resolved (NITI Aayog Reports).
- These disputes affect the supply of capital and credit for investment adversely and reduce productivity, as insecure landowners have less incentive to invest in their land.
- The clean land records and clear ownership of land facilitates the use of land as a factor of production. The analysis regarding the capacity of land as collateral for a loan can be less burdensome if the desired information is available in land records.
- India has improved its Ease of Doing Business ranking from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2022. It can improve more if litigation-free land can be provided to investors. The world bank report clearly states that the land parcels with uncontested land records regarding the dimension and area are accompanied by 23-43 percent higher chances of getting long-term investments compared to the cases where the land titles are in dispute (The World Bank Group, 2020)
- The third tier of our government system i.e. Panchayats do not have very buoyant sources of revenue. If the ownership of rural land is clear, then records of rights can be updated which will enable the gram panchayats to levy property taxes. This will not only empower them but also help in the development of rural India.

Therefore, to tackle the above issues, the SVAMITVA Scheme was launched by Hon’ble Prime Minister on National Panchayati Raj Day, 24 April 2021 with a resolve to enable the economic progress of Rural India by providing a “Record of Rights” to every rural household owner in the rural inhabited area. The scheme is implemented in a phased manner. Based on the successful implementation and outcome of the pilot phase in 9 States- - Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, so far, 31 States and UTs have signed MoU with the Survey of India for the

implementation of the SVAMITVA scheme in their States/UT. This scheme is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments, and the Survey of India and have the following objectives-

Objectives of the Scheme

According to the policy document of the scheme, the broad objectives of the scheme included:

- Capitalising property as a financial asset by the nation's rural population.
- Reduction in land or property-related disputes in rural areas
- Creation and updation of land records (RoRs) for rural planning.
- Provide the right of property to the true owner of rural land.
- Empowering the gram panchayats to levy and collect property tax, which would be available to the Panchayat for local use/ development work. This would provide the financial wherewithal to the Gram Panchayats.
- Creation of survey infrastructure and GIS (Geographic Information System) maps that can be used by any department or agency for proper planning of the area.

Process of the Scheme

1. An MoU is signed between Survey of India and respective states government in which state governments oblige to undertake amendments in States/UTs Rule and Acts to take the drone-based survey and provisions for Property Cards under the SVAMITVA Scheme.
2. To sensitise the local population and take them through the scheme methodology and benefits, the IEC activities will be undertaken in the identified villages by the panchayats.
3. Sites will be identified for the establishment of a Continuously Operating Reference Stations (CORS) network. The CORS network would support the establishment of Ground Control Points, which is an important activity for accurate Geo-referencing, ground truthing, and demarcation of Land.

4. Thereafter, there will be notification of villages for the survey, and demarcation of boundaries of Abadi and parcels using chuna lines will be undertaken.
5. The next set of activities is related to the survey of the land. Rural inhabited (Abadi) areas would be mapped by Survey of India using a drone Survey.
6. These images obtained through drone survey are then processed by Survey of India for the creation of property maps and high-resolution Spatial data. It would generate high-resolution and accurate maps to confer ownership property rights.
7. Post-survey activities include the ground truthing of the maps and ownership data collection by the State Revenue Department and Gram Panchayat. During the ground truthing if any inquiry or objection is raised by the land owners, then these objections will be resolved with the help of gram sabha, land owners, and a review of the existing documents. If needed, created maps can be corrected post-ground verification.
8. Thereafter, the printing and distribution of property cards to village household owners are done by State.
9. To monitor the scheme, online monitoring systems have been placed and program management units are constituted at the National and state level.

Achievements/Progress of the Scheme

S. No.	Component	Number
1.	Drone Survey (completed Villages)	2,23,835
2.	Maps handover to states (completed Villages)	1,87,043
3.	Land Parcel Digitized	6,24,85,859
4.	Maps provided for query (completed Villages)	91,546
5.	Cards prepared (completed Villages)	58,885
6.	Card distributed (completed Villages)	52,504
7.	CORS Monumentation	959
8.	CORS integrated with control centers	730

Source: svamitva.nic.in

One of the major achievements of the scheme is that 1:500 scale maps generated through the drone survey are of very high accuracy which the conventional methodology does not provide. This will help in the proper planning of rural areas. Moreover, editable and geo-tagged maps are produced at a fraction of the cost without the need for line-of-sight.

The CORS network which is established under the scheme helps in providing the accuracy of the 5-centimeter level and benchmarks the location. This piece of infrastructure can be further used by other departments like Revenue Department, Gram Panchayat (GP), Public Works Department, Rural Development Department, Agriculture, Drainage and Canal, Education, Electricity, Water, Health, etc. for the survey and implementing or using GIS-based applications.

It also facilitates the Gram panchayats to formulate Gram panchayat Development Plans which in turn helps to generate funds from the government and private sectors.

Even after having so many benefits, there are some challenges in the schemes which are needed to be addressed. The next section deals with these challenges and some ways to tackle them.

Challenges and Recommendations

1. The legal sanctity of the property cards issued under the scheme is the biggest challenge under the scheme. If the state government is not able to provide legal validity to these property cards, these will be just another document that does not prove any ownership of the land. Therefore, to give them legal validity, it is important that under State Revenue Act, the property cards should be listed as documents requiring stamp duty payment.
2. The participation of the local population in the whole process is very important. Until the population under question is not satisfied with the process of mapping Abadi areas, the implementation of the scheme in the particular area is not feasible.
3. The implementation of the scheme in the states requires the state governments to amend their various land revenue acts. Also, various states have different record-keeping

practices and under the scheme, all these practices have to be aligned. This is an arduous task and therefore states should be asked to form proper committees to ensure that the laws of the state are amended and proper handholding of revenue officers is done for efficient record keeping.

4. Although, the scheme is successful in identifying the conflicts related to rural land, still it does not spell out the mechanism to resolve these property-related conflicts. In this regard, various other departments have done a considerable job. For example, NITI Aayog along with the Department of Land Resources has drafted a Model Conclusive Land Titling Act and Rules. These kinds of efforts along with the Swamitva Scheme can provide some conclusive resolutions for the land-related woes of the nation.
5. One of the major objectives of the scheme is to empower the third tier of our democracy i.e Gram Panchayats by providing them with enough convenience and cost-effectiveness to levy a property tax. But, the legislature of some states has not rendered this power to their gram panchayats. Therefore, all states must review their property tax-related laws, their assessment and recording practices to capture all property details for tax assessment and ensure the timely updation of tax registers.
6. It is quite necessary that while undertaking the mapping exercise, the rights of the weak and marginalised communities are also preserved. These are the communities that have been historically excluded from involvement in growth as well as those continuing to face other barriers to participation in the process of development. In the case of rural areas, these communities include sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers, SCs and STs women, etc.

Overall, the SVAMITVA scheme is a solution-based approach to the land-related woes of rural India. It helps poor rural residents to mobilise funds through the monetisation of their residential assets. Moreover, procuring drone-based technology from Indian vendors will simultaneously help the Indian service sector to grow. Therefore, it will not be an exaggeration to call the “SVAMITVA Scheme” the flag bearer of the new Aatma Nirbhar Bharat. ■

Women Empowerment

Dr. Mahi Pal

The Constitution has enabled women to be instrumental in deepening decentralised governance through PRIs. They are not only for preparing plans for economic development but also with social justice caring all marginalised groups in rural areas.

After the Constitution (Seventy Third Amendment) Act 1992, elections in most of the States were held between 1995 and 1996. After the elections, a large number of women elected as members and chairpersons at different levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across the country. The author imparted training to elected women of Panchayats at Block level in Rewari, Gurgoan (then) Mahendra Garh districts of Haryana. One of the trainers used to say for women's new role as a Panchayat leader Talwar toh de di chalana nehi aatta (sword has been given but do not know how to use it). Kalam toh de dia chalana nehi aatta. (Pen has been given but do not know as how to use it). This situation has largely been changed now. Women have been using their power as elected representative to a large extent in making local governance, planning and development effective at grassroots.

As a result of reservation for women, there are 1,45,4488 elected women, including women belonging to the SCs/STs, as members and chairpersons at three tiers of Panchayati Raj

System (i.e. Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Panchayat). This is a paradigm shift in the history of political empowerment of women (here empowerment means exercising the powers guaranteed by the Constitution to women in PRIs) in decentralised political decision-making. Almost two and half decades have been elapsed since then, women have been working in Panchayats. An assessment of the working of women during two and half decades is very important to suggest task ahead for their effective working in Panchayats as their leaders.

Situational Analysis

Before assessing the working of women in Panchayats, let us quickly see their economic position vis-à-vis their counterparts based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). Professor Ramesh Chand, Member NITI Aayog and Dr. Jaspal Singh Consultant in the NITI Aayog wrote a paper on the theme workforce Changes and Employment: Some Findings from Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the National Statistical Office



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of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India. Using the data of PLFS, an attempt has been made to situate where women are standing on the scale of work participation and level of unemployment. The labour for participation rate in rural households by gender and work status from 2017-18 to 2019-20 revealed the following:

Usual status or principal status of women which was 18.18 per cent in 2017-18 has been increased to 21.08 per cent indicating an increase of 35.75 per cent in 2019-20 from 2017-18. Conversely, in case of their counterparts, the participation rate which was 54.90 in 2017-18 has been increased to 55.35 per cent indicating an increase to 2.60 per cent only. In case of current weekly status (CWS) of subsidiary status for the same period was an increase of 23.90 per cent among women whereas among men it was merely 5.04 per cent. Over a period of three years, although participation rate of both men and women has been increased but level of increase is far more among women as compared with their counterparts. If we see where women stand with regard to workers to population ratio, we found that although this has been increased in case of both men and women but rate of increase was sharp among women in rural areas.

It is interesting to note that the unemployment rate was higher among women as compared to their counterparts. For instance, the unemployment rate which was 5.83 per cent in 2017-18 has come down to 4.53 registering a decrease of 22.30 per cent whereas, in case of women, the unemployment rate, was 3.80 per cent in 2017-18 has come down to 2.63 per cent indicating a decrease of 30.79 per cent.

If we see sector wise participation of women, it is found that the presence of women in agriculture sector has been increased from 2017-18 to 2018-19 whereas their presence in industry and service sectors have been decreased. Although share of men in these two sectors have been reduced but rate of decrease was sharper in case of women as compared to their counterparts.

It is emerged from above discussion that women's share in economic activities has been increased as compared to their counterparts. But, the moot question is, whether they have a say in

the expenditure pattern of the household. That is a separate issue to be discussed. But from an economic angle, it may be safely said that women's economic empowerment might have motivated them to function effectively in local governance.

Women's Representation in Panchayats Before and after 73rd Amendment

Before the 73rd Amendment Act, it was not mandatory on the part of the States to provide reservation for women in Panchayats. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report on the Panchayati Raj (1957) had recommended nomination of two women as members of the Panchayats, who have interest in Women and Child Development. In 1974, the Committee on the Status of Women in India recommended the establishment of statutory Women's Panchayats at the village level with autonomy and resources of their own for taking up various rural developmental activities and raise their voices against conventional attitudes of society. It was recommended by the Ashok Mehta Committee Report (1987) that two women who got the highest number of votes in Zilla Parishad elections might be made member of it. If no women could contest elections, two women might be co-opted at this level and at the level of the Mandal Panchayat. The National Perspective Plan for Women, (1988) among others, had recommended 30 per cent reservation of seats for women as members and chairpersons at all levels of the Panchayats. Besides, some percentage of Chief Executives of the Panchayats at lower, middle and apex levels must also be reserved for women.

The efforts and recommendations of these Committees and Commissions' finally took some concrete form when not less than one third seats for women as members and chairpersons in the Panchayats have been guaranteed by the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act.

But, the 73rd Amendment Act has provided not less than one-third reservation for women in Panchayats as mandatory. As a result of this provisions, a large number of women were elected as members and chairpersons of Panchayats. Subsequently, over a period of time as many as 22 States/UTs made 50 per cent reservation for women

(To be continued on page no. 30)

An Inclusive, Futuristic & Sustainable

For a 'Krishi-pradhan' nation, the agriculture and allied activities sector continues to play a pivotal role in our overall growth and development, in addition to guaranteeing food security. For a government that considers *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas* as its guiding philosophy, prioritising the promotion of inclusive and all-encompassing development of farmers is paramount. Over the past six years, the Indian agriculture sector has grown at an average annual growth rate of 4.6%. This is a direct result of the Modi Government's push for a balance between modern and sustainable practices to ensure long-term success for India's 'Annadata's'.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has specified increasing farmers' income as one of his primary goals. The government aims to achieve this by increasing productivity, bringing down the cost of production, ensuring higher prices and direct income transfers to farmers.

Augmenting Aatmanirbharta with an emphasis on Crop Yields

Since 2014, numerous initiatives, including the **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY)**, the **Soil Health Card Scheme** and the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** have focused on improving irrigation, enhancing soil fertility, and lowering crop loss due to adverse weather events.

The 'Per Drop, More Crop' component, a part of the PMKSY, has helped increase water use efficiency, reduce the cost of inputs and increase productivity at the farm level through micro-irrigation technologies.

Per Drop, More Crop
 Nearly 70 lakh hectares covered under micro-irrigation
 Land covered increased by nearly 1,116% since its launch in 2015-16



Crop insurance claims over Rs 1.3 lakh crore have been sanctioned under the scheme. The share of small farmers covered under PMFBY has increased by 282% since its launch in 2016.

In a push to move towards a cleaner environment, the government is promoting natural farming which will improve soil health and increase the nutrition content in the food. To move towards sustainable agriculture, in December 2022, the Central government approved the National Mission on Natural Farming with an approximate expenditure of Rs. 1,600 crores.

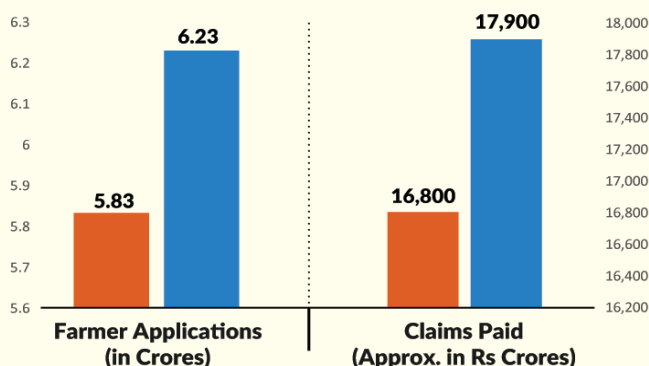
Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

● 2016-17 ● 2020-21



Total Applications: 38 Crores
Total Claims Paid: Rs 1,30,000 Crores*

*Provisional Value



In line with this, the Union Budget 2023-24 has also announced an Agriculture Accelerator Fund to encourage agri-startups and an Aatmanirbhar Clean Plant Program to boost the availability of disease-free, quality planting material for high-value horticultural crops.

Soil Health Cards for Bettering Soil Quality



22 crore

cards distributed to farmers across the country since 2015

Pathways for Direct Benefits to Farmers

Over the course of the last nine years, the Modi government's focus has shifted from increasing farmers' access to resources to ensuring higher prices for farm produce and financial support in the form of direct income transfers.

For improved return on investment to farmers, the Modi government has been consistently increasing the Minimum Support Price (MSP) offered for all major crops. Moreover, to stimulate a transition in farming away from staple wheat and rice crops towards more nutritious and soil-friendly crops, the government has been increasing MSP on pulses and oilseeds for self-sufficiency in production.


The Modi government has taken several steps to ensure Indian millets form a central part of a healthy diet in India and at the global scale. PM Modi's vision and efforts have led to the United Nations declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets with support from more than 70 nations across the globe. The government will promote Indian millets or *Shree Anna* and the Indian Institute of Millet Research, Hyderabad as a Centre of Excellence, for sharing best practices, research and technologies in millet farming at the international level.

In the 2019-20 Union Budget, the Modi government announced Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), a direct income transfer scheme to provide cash support of Rs. 6,000 per landholding farmer per year. In a span of three years, the scheme has provided cash assistance totalling Rs. 2 lakh crores to eligible farmers across India. To ensure hassle-free credit availability at a cheaper rate, the **Kisan Credit Card (KCC) Scheme** empowers farmers to purchase agricultural products and services on credit at any time.

Minimum Support Price for Crops

MSP for Wheat jumped by 52%, Paddy MSP by 56% between 2014-15 & 2022-23





PM-Kisan
 More than 10 Crore farmers have received cash support since inception
 Total beneficiaries increased by more than **230%** since December 2018.

Agricultural Landscape for India

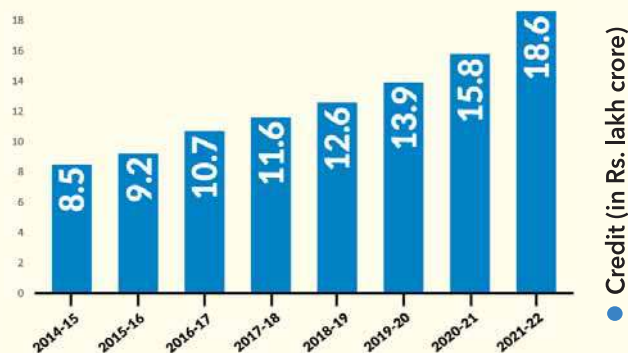
Credit Support through Kisan Credit Cards

As of 30th December 2022, 3.89 crore farmers issued KCC



As a result of the initiatives taken and the measures to strengthen existing policies, there has been a consistent increase in the Institutional Agriculture Credit flow over the years. In FY2022, the actual agricultural credit disbursed exceeded the target for the year, set at Rs 16.5 lakh crore, by 13%. Furthermore, the government aims to increase the flow of credit to the agriculture sector with a target of Rs 18.5 lakh crore for 2022-23.

119% Increase in Institutional Credit to Agriculture Sector



Enabling a Smart and Sustainable Agriculture for India

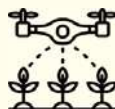
By promoting the adoption and use of new-age technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles across farming and agricultural activities, the government aims to reduce the cost of farming and increase income from agriculture.

Farmers belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, women and farmers of northeastern states are being provided with a subsidy worth 50% of the drone's cost or a maximum of Rs. 5 lakhs for the purchase of drones for agricultural use.

Union Budget 2023-24 allocated a massive

Rs 127 crore

to promote use of Kisan Drones



To promote an increase in farm yields through a proportionate application of fertilisers, the government is working towards the One Nation, One Fertiliser scheme to provide farmers with quality fertilisers of Bharat brand at affordable rates. This measure is estimated to save 5% of the amount of freight subsidy.

12,000 Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samruddhi Kendras (PMKSK) have been set up as one-stop shops for the purchase and knowledge of fertilisers and to give agri-inputs alongside providing testing facilities for soil, seeds, and fertilisers.

Furthermore, initiatives such as the Electronic National Agricultural Market or e-NAM is assisting farmers in the better discovery of market prices for their produce, helping in achieving the end goal of doubling farmers' income.

As of 31st December 2022, 1.7 crore+ farmers & 2.3 lakh+ traders are registered on e-NAM portal



PM Narendra Modi at the release of the 13th installment of the PM-KISAN Scheme in Belagavi, Karnataka.

“ The true strength of this country's agriculture lies in the small farmers. Those who produce yield in one acre or two acres of land with a lot of difficulty for 80-85 percent of the population of the country. ”
- PM Narendra Modi

Transitioning Agriculture, Transforming India

Over the course of the last nine years, the Modi government's efforts in revolutionising agriculture have helped the agriculture and allied activities sector contribute significantly to the country's overall growth and development. The agriculture and allied activities sector witnessed a 53% increase in its exports since 2015-16.

The success of the allied sector can be determined by the fact that India is the world's largest producer of milk. Led by PM Modi, India registered a 51% increase in milk production since 2014-15, contributing 24% of global milk production in 2021-22.

As a result of the shifting focus on pulses, focus on the horticulture industry and a push towards agri-processing, agriculture and farming as an occupation is more robust to weather shocks and has resulted in increased farm incomes across the board.



2021-22 witnessed a record production of foodgrains at 316 million tonnes and horticulture crops at 342 million tonnes

This era of buoyant performance in the agriculture sector can be clearly attributed to the steps undertaken by the Modi government which include assistance to farmer-producer organisations, promoting crop diversity and boosting agricultural output through support granted for mechanisation.

The pro-farmer and pro-people policies of the government have enabled an ecosystem of reliance, resilience and sustenance. The technology-led approach of the Modi government has generated a push towards inclusive and sustainable agriculture in India.

(Continued from page no. 27)

upto September 8, 2021. These States/UTs are: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Gujarat, Haryana,

Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. Table -1 present the state-wise representation of women in Panchayats.

Table -1

State/UT-wise number of Elected Representatives and Elected Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions in the country

S. No.	State / UTs	Number of Elected Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions	Number of Elected Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions
1.	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	858	306 (35.66)
2.	Andhra Pradesh	156050	78025 (50.00)
3.	Arunachal Pradesh	9383	3658 (39.00)
4.	Assam	26754	14609 (54.60)
5.	Bihar	136573	71046 (52.00)
6.	Chhattisgarh	170465	93392 (55.00)
7.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	147	47 (32.00)
8.	Daman & Diu	192	92 (48.00)
9.	Goa	1555	571 (36.72)
10.	Gujarat	144080	71988 (50.00)
11.	Haryana	70035	29499 (42.12)
12.	Himachal Pradesh	28723	14398 (50.12)
13.	Jammu & Kashmir	39850	13224 (33.18)
14.	Jharkhand	59638	30757 (51.57)
15.	Karnataka	101954	51030 (50.05)
16.	Kerala	18372	9630 (52.41)
17.	Ladakh	1661	515 (31.00)
18.	Lakshadweep	110	41 (37.27)
19.	Madhya Pradesh	392981	196490 (50.00)
20.	Maharashtra	240635	128677 (53.47)
21.	Manipur	1736	880 (50.69)
22.	Odisha	107487	56627 (52.68)
23.	Puducherry*	-	-
24.	Punjab	100312	41922 (41.79)
25.	Rajasthan	126271	64802 (51.32)
26.	Sikkim	1153	580 (50.30)
27.	Tamil Nadu	106450	56407 (53.00)
28.	Telangana	103468	52096 (50.35)
29.	Tripura	6646	3006 (45.23)
30.	Uttar Pradesh	913417	304538 (33.35)
31.	Uttarakhand	62796	35177 (56.00)
32.	West Bengal	59229	30458 (51.42)
Total		3188981	1454488 (45.61)

* Panchayat elections in Puducherry have not been conducted after 2011.

Source: panchayat.gov.in/web/ministry-of-panchayati-raj-2/pri. The percentage given in the parenthesis has been calculated by the author.

It may be seen from the table that at national level women as Members and Presidents of Panchayats are about 46 per cent of total elected representatives. In some of the States, their share is more than 50 per cent as the Table shows.

Women Participation in Panchayats: An Assessment

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India has conducted a nationwide study entitled “Study on Elected Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions” in 2008 covering 23 States, 114 Districts, 228 Blocks, 1368 GPs, 1368 Pradhans (Presidents of GP), 5350 Ward Members, 20154 community members. The study analysed different dimensions of elected women representatives’ vis-à-vis their male counterparts, track record of their political careers over the past three rounds of elections. The main findings of the study are given below:

In terms of social groups, a large number were from more marginalized groups of society. Educationally, 48 per cent were middle and above. Twenty per cent were illiterate, but the gender gap was significant (women- 24%; men -6%). Economically, Pradhans (president of Gram Panchayat) had a better economic status and there is no gender difference. Getting associated with local politics and contesting the local body election for the first time was found to be very small, implying that the majority of the elected representatives did not have long- standing political linkages. As many as 30 per cent husbands and 12 per cent other family members were reported as important motivating persons for women to contest elections. Reservation facilitated the first entry into politics for 83 per cent of women elected representatives. Proper training was must for effective functioning. But as much as 43 per cent women elected representatives did not get opportunity to attend training due to not holding training (61%) and not called for training (22%).

Quality of Participation of Elected Women Representatives

Overall, the quality of participation of women assessed across various dimensions turned out to be reasonably good. As many as 86 per cent of female president of Panchayats reported executing

important role of being a local Panchayati Raj functionary whereas their counterparts’ percentage in this regards was 93. No much difference was noticed between the two. But the other side of the women participation was that women participation in village development was less than 25 per cent pointing out for better community mobilisation by elected representatives.

Determinants of Good Performance

The study revealed that the important determinants of a good performance are: (i) a longer duration of being an elected representative (ii) training (iii) education upto middle school and above (iv) active involvement in Panchayat work. On the basis of the performance index, it is found that the high performers among elected women representatives were from Kerala, followed by Karnataka, Tripura, Maharashtra, Sikkim and West Bengal. On the other hand, the performance score was on the lower side in Orissa. Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

Impact of Participation of Women and Community Development

Women participation in PRIs impacted them positively as 79 per cent of women representatives realised enhancement in their self-esteem, 81 per cent perceived enhancement of confidence and 74 per cent realised their enhanced capacity in decision-making ability, 67 per cent women opined that after becoming elected representatives of Panchayats their respect has been enhanced within family and 82 per cent women opined enhanced their respect in community.

As many as 72 per cent have reported that they have actively involved in providing civic amenities and a quite significant number (62%) made efforts in enhancing enrolment of children in schools and reducing domestic violence in the villages.

Main Recommendations of the Study are Given Below

(i) Enhancement of educational levels of elected representatives, (ii) encouragement of joining of younger women in politics, (iii) imparting relevant training and capacity building regularly, covering multiple dimensions including rules and regulations, administrative issues, budgeting and

finance and the implementation of development schemes, (iv) giving adequate honoraria, (v) Association of women in various groups including Self-help groups and committees for increasing their visibility in villages.

Besides, the MoPR, Government of India constituted an Expert Committee entitled: 'Towards Holistic Panchayati Raj: Twentieth Anniversary Report of the Expert Committee on Leveraging Panchayats for Efficient Delivery of Public Goods and Services on 27th August 2012. The Committee submitted its report on 24th April 2013. In the report, findings of various studies have been given with respect of seeing impact of women reservation on rural development and delivery of goods and services. Findings of some of the studies included in the report are given below with the motive to assess as to what extent women reservation in Panchayats impacted in rural areas.

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) conducted a study of 105 Gram Panchayats in West Bengal on providing public goods to people by the Panchayats headed by women and by others. Findings of the study showed that women invested more in infrastructure relevant for rural women's needs like water, fuel, roads while their counterparts invested more in education. Another empirical study conducted by Duflo and Topalova (2004) showed that "villagers are less likely to pay bribes in Gram Panchayats with office of chairperson reserved for women. Yet residents of these villages are less satisfied with the public goods, including goods that are beyond the jurisdictions of the Panchayats. This "less satisfaction" can be seen to reflect the patriarchal mindset not accepting women's leadership role or quality". Bardhan et.al (2005) studied the effect of women's reservation on the targeting of various local programmes and found improvement in the targeting of subsidised loans to marginalised groups.

Conversely, study of Besley, Pande and Rao (2005) revealed that "Panchayats led by women are no worse or better in their performance than those with male leaders, and women politicians do not make decisions in line with the needs of women. Importantly, however, political experience enhances performance of women leaders more than it does for men, and women in villages which

The Constitution has enabled women to be instrumental in deepening decentralised governance through PRIs. They are not only for preparing plans for economic development but also with social justice caring all marginalised groups in rural areas. Studies revealed that women have contributed positively in the delivery of goods and services to masses.

are less dominated by upper castes, and in states that have relatively mature Panchayat systems, perform better".

Raabe et.al (2010) using a sample of 80 GPs and 966 households in 12 districts of Karnataka and found out that effective local governance and service deliver are mainly "determined by social, economic and institutional factors are unrelated to women's reservation requirements like literacy, household's institutional and political linkage, its location in GP, degree of community involvement in service provision, and fiscal devolution of activities. Women's reservations per se are insufficient means for making rural service provision and local governance more inclusive and gender equitable". One of the important findings emerged from various studies is that women as panchayat leaders must have social, economic and institutional support to carry out their responsibilities more effectively.

The Task Ahead

The MoPR has brought out the roadmap for the Panchayati Raj (2011-17)- An All India Perspective, in which a number of steps are suggested for empowerment of women. These are given below.

- (i) A provision of women component plans in PRI budgets.
- (ii) Linkages with SHGs in all levels of PRIs.
- (iii) Adequate training and capacity building of elected women representatives.
- (iv) Leadership training programmes for elected women representatives.
- (v) Training of other functionaries on gender issues.

- (vi) Peer-to-peer and horizontal learning from success stories.
- (vii) Sharing good practices and exposure visits.
- (viii) Political parties must put up women candidates.
- (ix) Women candidates be given opportunity to serve a full term.
- (x) Mahila Sabhas may be encouraged to facilitate women's concerns and be raised on priority basis in meetings of Gram/Ward Sabhas.
- (xi) Separate quorum for women participation in Gram/Ward Sabha.

Besides these, following are also some important suggestions for effective participation of women in Panchayats.

- (i) Mobilisation of women into their own collectives for better outcomes. The Kudumbashree network in Kerala provides a successful example in this regard.
- (ii) Devolution of powers and authority to

Panchayats enabling them to function as Institution of self-government.

- (iii) Reservation for women in services.

Conclusion

The Constitution has enabled women to be instrumental in deepening decentralised governance through PRIs. They are not only for preparing plans for economic development but also with social justice caring all marginalised groups in rural areas. Studies revealed that women have contributed positively in the delivery of goods and services to masses. Their understanding is more for infrastructure development for rural development than their counterparts. They could play their role in a more effective way, if the suggestions given in the paper may be put into practice. Panchayats should function as institutions of self- government meaning thereby that they at least enjoy triple Fs (clearly defined functions, adequate funds and sufficient functionaries) at their level. ■

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2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Manjula Wadhwa

With a view to realise the SDGs, it is crucial that the Village/Gram Panchayats develop their own action plan to improve living conditions. There is a need to be more inclusive in addressing the problems of people from different sections.

The expression 'Sabka Sath-Sabka Vikas' which translates as 'Collective Effort-Inclusive Growth' and has been popularised by the Prime Minister, forms the corner stone of India's National Development Agenda. To fast track this agenda, especially to address the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in rural India through Panchayati Raj Institutions, Ministry of Panchayati Raj constituted an expert group to provide recommendations and way forward for localisation of SDGs through PRIs. The report, undoubtedly proved to be a welcome initiative to better understand how the SDGs can be localised to engage PRIs and all stakeholders in rural India. It also elaborates on the need for greater coordination across governments and for multi-level governance to mainstream SDGs at the local level.

To kick off, let us understand the concept of Sustainable Development-the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. So, what are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - these are a new, universal set of goals, targets and indicators that 193 countries in the world have jointly set. The Government of India has played a leadership role in defining the SDG agenda. Starting January 2016, countries are expected to frame their agendas and policies to end poverty, protect the planet, enjoy peace and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. The linchpin of this Agenda are People, Prosperity, Peace, Partnerships and the Planet.

In a country like India where about 65 per cent of population lives in rural areas, Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) have been a critical



component of local self-governance. These institutions have achieved last-mile connectivity in execution of various schemes of different line departments/ministries. In this backdrop, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have signed a joint statement of understanding on localisation of Sustainable Development Goals. The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) 2018-19 to 2021-22 and revamped scheme, approved for implementation from 2022-23 to 2025-26 mandates to capacitate elected representatives and functionaries of PRIs to deliver on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through participatory local planning at the Gram Panchayat level. The scheme is demand-

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The twin objectives of Panchayati Raj System as envisaged by the Indian Constitution are to ensure local economic development and social justice. They are expected to play an effective role in the planning and implementation of functions related to 29 subjects enlisted in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Many SDG targets fall within the purview of these subjects.

driven and funds are released to states and union territories on the basis of their Annual Action Plans as approved by the Central Empowered Committee of RGSA. There is no fixed target for the scheme. The PRIs provide research and education and facilitates collaboration to help investors align their responsible investment practices with the broader sustainable objectives of society- as currently best defined by the SDGs.

The twin objectives of Panchayati Raj System as envisaged by the Indian Constitution are to ensure local economic development and social justice. They are expected to play an effective role in the planning and implementation of functions related to 29 subjects enlisted in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Many SDG targets fall within the purview of these subjects. Hence, the Gram panchayats (GPs) across the country have a highly significant role in the attainment of SDGs and so under people's plan Campaign (PPC) rolled out from 2nd October 2021 up to 31st January, 2022 for preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) for 2022-23, Panchayats were advised to mandatorily integrate the Village Poverty Reduction Plans (VPRPs) into GPDP, with a view to synchronise them with SDGs. Resources from various centrally and state sponsored schemes are being leveraged and converged at the GP level. Here, the most important is to set GP-level targets with measurable indicators that will have vertical and horizontal linkages, convergence possibilities, resource mobilisation potential and feasible action plan for the Gram Panchayats.

As per the latest figures from Ministry of Panchayati Raj, there are nearly 2.65 lakh elected Panchayats and 30 lakh Elected Representatives

in our country. The total number of Elected Representatives is more than 3.1 million out of which around 46 per cent are women. In this perspective, building capacities at the local level is critical to drive the agenda for SDGs/outcome based local planning. The role of Gram Panchayats /Rural Local Bodies in attainment of SDGs has been found invaluable owing to its position as a link to reduce socio-economic as well as urban rural divide so far as local economic development and social justice is concerned. SDG by itself would be a distant reality if the idea and the possibility it represents is not integrated into all manners of rural-centric socio-economic interventions being implemented with and through Gram Panchayats. To ensure that the essence of SDGs is mainstreamed into GPDP to deliver tangible, measurable and enduring state of well-being to the last mile and the last citizen, development of an effective capacity building strategy at the state level is crucial. Substantial resources have been devolved to the Gram Panchayats - Rs. 4.36 lakh crore for the period 2021-2026 under 15th Finance Commission award.

It is highly relevant here to delve deep into the concept of Localisation of SDGs. It is a convergence point between local and regional governments and their associations, national governments, businesses, community-based organisations and other local actors and the United Nations system. Local: 2030 supports local leaders in collaboratively incubating and sharing solutions, unlocking bottlenecks and implementing strategies that advance the SDGs at the local level. Sustainable Development Goals are a global effort that has one major objective- achieving a better future for all and to achieve these global and national targets, localisation is a crucial lever. If India is to achieve its goals by 2030, it must build a mechanism for effectively localising the SDGs - one that leverages and integrates the social capital that exists in women's collectives and with the local self-governance of the Panchayati Raj system. Localising the SDGs at the rural level will not only challenge existing unequal relations but also provide an institutional framework that is in sync with national and global priorities.

The role of panchayats in the attainment of SDGs, is summed up in the following ways

1. Convergent Implementation of the Schemes

Ensure effective implementation of flagship programmes pertaining to livelihood like NRLM, MGNREGS, SBM etc.

- Focus on Swachh Bharat Mission.
- Take leadership for behaviour change management for sanitation and hygiene.
- Plan and implement drinking water and sanitation projects in panchayats. Focus on poverty reduction through convergent planning integrating MGNREGS and NRLM.
- Set local development targets for eradication of poverty and mobilise people's participation and resources for the same.
- Have equitable systems for management of common property resources-develop resource mapping based planning.

2. Participatory Outcome Based Planning for Local Development

- Prepare local development plans that touch on economic, social and environmental concerns through participatory processes, integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values.
- Effective functioning of the Gram Sabha as participatory discussion and decision making forum for local development.
- Ensure coordinated functioning in tandem with SHGs and their collectives.
- Institute outcome based planning that sets baselines and monitors advancement in development indices.
- Ensure equitable provision of basic services to citizens through the allocated resources.

3. Specific Governance Interventions in Panchayats

- Effective functioning of Standing Committees and Functional Committees of the panchayats.
- Strengthening different fora for community participation.
- Institution of clear community based monitoring and tracking mechanisms and

information feedback to the community.

- Universal birth registration ensured in all States where panchayats are birth registration authorities. In others, panchayats to track birth registration and function as reporting authority.
- Preparation and management of local biodiversity registers by panchayats.
- Institution of environment audit into social audit of the local planning and implementation process.
- Improvement in revenue generation by the panchayat for finding resources for service delivery.
- Improved budgetary and record keeping practices so that performance and achievement of panchayats can be monitored.
- Digitisation to support governance at panchayat level.

4. Interventions across Tiers of Panchayats

- Effect convergent planning between the three-tiers of Panchayati Raj.
- Effective functioning of the District Planning Committees which link rural and urban planning.
- Coordination for service delivery and implementation of flagship schemes.

The 2030 Agenda also puts the principles of equality and non-discrimination at its heart, with a commitment to "leave no one behind" and "reach those farthest behind first", special attention to marginalised groups and two dedicated goals on combatting discrimination and inequalities (SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 10 on inequalities within and between countries), as well as a cross-cutting commitment to data disaggregation, inclusive participatory approaches and accountability for the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review indicate that the entire Agenda was developed using a human rights-based approach, which is also crucial for its effective implementation. Actually, there is no 'one size fits all' approach for localisation, but India can certainly share experiences with other countries and learn from them. The overall coordination

for implementation of SDGs in India is handled by the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), which is driven by the mandate to work in a spirit of cooperative and competitive federalism and has been extensively engaging with governments at national and local levels as well as civil society organisations. The fact that our Government has given a pride of place to digital governance, especially to make them people centric, has paved the way for citizen friendly localisation. Institutional structures at the state and local levels, such as nodal SDG department, dedicated SDG teams and district level structures, help dissolve a silo based functioning. After the fiscal decentralisation, the government took forward in 2015-16 the implementation of local development plans integrating SDGs into them. 'SDG India Index', spearheaded by NITI Aayog since 2018 and published annually since then, plays a pivotal role in SDG localisation by measuring performance by using globally-accepted methodology and ranking them accordingly.

The 2022 edition of SDG Index covers all 17 Goals and 120 indicators. It offers valuable insights to policymakers on the remaining distance to travel, gaps and data and statistical challenges. The utility of the Index extends beyond progress monitoring it has implemented cooperative and competitive federalism in the true spirit of democracy and good governance. India's second VNR (Voluntary National Review) entitled, "Decade of Action: Taking SDGs from Global to Local", at the 2020 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), adopted a "whole of-society" approach. SDG localisation process is not limited only to government interventions but also includes civil society organisations. In spite of the pandemic, there has been remarkable progress witnessed in some crucial goals, for example in Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

If we take stock of the current progress, we find, India being home to one-sixth of humanity and the world's largest youth population, its progress is central to the global achievement of 2030 Agenda. The Government of India has

demonstrated its consistent commitment to attaining the SDGs by seeking to ensure access to basic services and empowerment of the most vulnerable communities while simultaneously fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Driven by flagship schemes, significant achievements have come in areas such as scaled up access to electricity, sanitation and housing. Equally noteworthy are efforts towards ensuring food security; a vision of Universal Health Coverage; ensuring that all children receive quality education; improving youth skills and employment and demonstrating that sustainable growth can go hand-in-hand with addressing the Triple Planetary Crisis. Its world-class digital governance systems increasingly drive India's efforts to strengthen service delivery systems for the most marginalised. India's extensive response to COVID-19 pandemic illustrated this approach, combining some of the world's largest social protection and food security programmes with States and UTs playing a central role; policy reforms and economic packages to protect the economy and also India's leadership in developing and supplying COVID-19 vaccines, not only for its population but also for other countries in need through generous donations to the COVAX Facility.

If we analyse the status of July 2022, India slipped spots from last year's 117 to rank 121 on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted as a part of the 2030 agenda. India's recent overall SDG score was 66 out of 100. Comparing with South Asian Nations: With the latest rankings, India is now behind all south Asian nations except Pakistan. The south Asian countries ahead of India are Bhutan ranked 75, Sri Lanka at 87, Nepal at 96 and Bangladesh at 109. Jharkhand and Bihar are the least prepared to meet the SDGs by the target year 2030. Kerala ranked first, followed by Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh in the second position. The reasons behind it are:-

COVID-19– The pandemic put a severe brake on the progress. It pushed the countries to impose lockdowns that brought all progressive work towards SDG attainment to a standstill.

Climate Change– As per SDG 2022 report, global temperatures have been rising unabated. The world is facing a major climate catastrophe due to increased heatwaves, drought and apocalyptic

wildfires and floods which are affecting billions of people around the globe

Geopolitical Conflicts– The Russia-Ukraine crisis has caused food, fuel and fertiliser prices to skyrocket. It also disturbed global trade supplies and caused the financial markets to tumble

Data Gaps– The Report also notes that despite some progress, serious data gaps exist in SDG monitoring. This includes data in terms of geographic coverage, timeliness and level of disaggregation.

Hence, with a view to realise the SDGs, it is crucial that the Village/Gram Panchayats develop their own action plan to improve living conditions. There is a need to be more inclusive in addressing the problems of people from different sections. Many vulnerable families and persons coming from the Dalit community, widows, single women, old people, children without care and protection, persons with disability need special attention from all the service providing agencies and village community as a whole. Strengthening stakeholder participation in governance, particularly in decision making, is the second most important point. The various village level committees formed under different development programs like School Management Committee, Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee, PDS Committee, Social Justice Committee need to be strengthened so that they plan and monitor the service delivery in an effective manner. Along with this, pro active disclosure of various schemes should be displayed in public notice board. For example, if the stock of essential drugs at the beginning of the month is displayed in the Primary Health Centre, the access to free medicines can be improved. Similar is the case with utilisation of different funds, PDS stock, etc. Each village panchayat must assess the status of various public assets and services with regard to their functionality and thus rationalise their usage. Primary focus must be given to five key services: (i) Anganwadi- as it has direct link with child development and curbing malnutrition as well (ii) primary education which is linked with universal literacy, particularly among girls (iii) drinking water and sanitation, having direct linkage with the health status (iv) access to public health services, this will improve

institutional delivery and healthy life (v) access to public distribution system and food availability in Anganwadi and mid-day-meal it will address malnutrition.

Further, GPDP process would have situational analysis as the first step. For every SDG, the Gram Panchayat can prepare a base scenario. It would be appropriate to introduce SDG and all the relevant themes to the Gram Sabha and ensure that the Gram Sabha discussions consider these aspects. Let us also see how other programmes and schemes can be tapped/ converged/ supplemented/ complemented to address SDGs. Also, how various other resources and activities – institutional, schematic, departmental, voluntary, local can be used and incorporated in the plan. The Gram Panchayat Development Plan, thus, needs to be a holistic and result based plan contributing to the SDGs from local to global. In addition, Ministries/ States to map and align their schemes' progress assessments to the indicators at Gram Panchayat level, Block Panchayat level and District Panchayat level. In this respect, guidelines are to be issued from Ministries and State Governments relating to Localisation of SDGs involving and stating clearly role of various institutions below the State level till the GP level. Panchayat Development Index and assessment framework with Themes, Local targets and Indicators for measuring progress worked through MoSPI and States Statistics Departments, linking to evidence based plan and budget with SDG markers is to be put in place, covering all schemes operating at Gram Panchayat level. Establishing a robust data sharing and monitoring mechanism covering all the LIF targets and indicators and linked to reports of performance for Departments/Ministries and PRIs on Localising SDGs, is the need of the hour. Setting up and utilising the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee for convergence and Localisation of SDGs in PRIs on regular basis, is also desirable.

To conclude, accelerated efforts are needed to boost sustainable solutions to the biggest challenges we face. It asks for transformative economic, social and environmental solutions. We will need inspiration and creativity at global, local and individual levels- from national and local governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and youth. ■



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Water Management through Panchayats

Dr. Jagdeep Saxena

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are entrusted with the task of delivering basic services and development of required infrastructure in rural areas. In the context of water governance or water management, the Gram Panchayats (GPs) own and manage the water supply scheme for communities; and also approve investment plans, annual budget and user-fee charges after discussion in the Gram Sabha.

Water is one of the most important renewable natural resource for sustaining life and livelihoods, especially in rural areas. At the same time, water is increasingly becoming a scarce commodity mainly due to over-exploitation of the source and major deficits in natural replenishment. Increasing pressure of population and fast growth in water-consuming sectors (agriculture, industries, construction etc.) have necessitated sustainable water management in rural areas. National Water Policy (2012) advocated involvement of local bodies in planning of water resource projects for better impact and efficiency. People's participation makes water management more responsive towards local needs and also ensures transparency and equity in distribution. Recently, the Prime Minister, while addressing 1st All India Annual State Minister's Conference on Water, emphasised the central role of Gram Panchayats in water management in villages; and reiterated that Gram Panchayats should prepare an action plan for the next five years where a roadmap ranging from water supply to cleanliness and waste management should be considered. The Prime Minister had also asked States to adopt ways where the water budget is prepared at the Panchayat level based on how much water is required in which village and what work can be done for it. In this context, Panchayats have assumed greater significance as vehicles of program implementation and localised planning. In a parallel

development, Water Users Associations, commonly called 'Pani Samiti' or 'Pani Panchayat', have been created for local and participatory management of surface irrigation systems.

Water being a state subject, water resource projects are planned, funded, executed and maintained by State Governments as per their own resources and priorities. While Government of India provides technical support, and in some cases partial financial assistance in terms with the existing schemes being implemented by the Union Ministries. All projects supported by Government



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of India in the water resources/management sector aims to improve water security in the country, and local level planning is the key for project implementation.

Panchayats for Participation

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are entrusted with the task of delivering basic services and development of required infrastructure in rural areas. In the context of water governance or water management, the Gram Panchayats (GPs) own and manage the water supply scheme for communities; and also approve investment plans, annual budget and user-fee charges after discussion in the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha comprises of the larger community and takes key decisions, such as estimated demand of drinking water (quantity), most appropriate source of water, type and nature of water supply scheme, contribution of household and user-fee charges etc. After free and fair deliberations, Gram Sabha approves village plans and also undertakes social audit as per mandate. Pani Samiti/ Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) is a standing committee of the GP and is responsible for planning, implementation, operation, maintenance and management of village drinking water security. Such activities include opening and managing bank account, collection of household contributions and user fees, and ensuring professional support for technicians engaged in extraction and distribution of water supply. Pani Samitis also implement demand side management strategies, especially for curbing wastage of water at domestic and community level. Creation of awareness for keeping water clean and safe is also a key agenda of Pani Samitis. Regular water quality monitoring and surveillance is a crucial responsibility of the VWSC to keep a check on bacterial contamination which causes many serious diseases. Regular monitoring, sampling and analysis of ground-water drinking sources is essential to keep crippling diseases, such as fluorosis and arsenical dermatitis, at bay. VWSC liaisons with Primary Health Centres and NRHN workers (ASHA) to monitor incidence of water-borne diseases. GPs/VWSCs get support from District Water and Sanitation Mission in finalising water plans and setting priorities. Block Resource Centre helps communities prepare and implement

plans by providing motivation and training along with organising technical support.

In addition to ensuring adequate quantity and quality of water for domestic users, VWSCs are also responsible for provision of water for schools, aanganwadi centres etc. While preparing Village Water Security Plan, VWSCs take into account needs of livestock especially in water quality affected areas where livestock are highly vulnerable to chemical contamination. To maintain adequate supply of water during drought or deficiency of rains, various mitigation measures are planned and implemented such as rooftop rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, revival/rehabilitation of traditional water storage tanks, and conjunctive use of surface water and groundwater. Interventions such as check dams/nala bunds, percolation tanks, sub-surface dykes and hydro-fracturing are used either to capture rainwater or surface water runoff or to help recharge groundwater.

Members of VWSC and planning team undertake an extensive field survey to gather information on the sources of water and water supply infrastructure which is used to prepare the village plan. An ideal village plan invariably includes water budget, water source plan, water safety plan, operating plan and service improvement plan. Water budget is framed for summer and winter seasons separately and takes into account the water usage for different purposes such as agriculture, human consumption, livestock consumption, local industries and other uses. Gram Sabha takes decisions on the most appropriate and valued allocation of water for different sub-sectors. However, in most of the cases, priority is given to drinking water for human and animal consumption. In case of gap between available water and its requirement, VWSC explores options to increase the available water mainly by developing additional resources. At this time, the water source plan comes into action to select the best and most suited intervention. Water safety plan mainly suggest ways and means to keep water safe and clean at source and also during storage. On the basis of operation plan, key functions of operation, maintenance and management are performed on whole water supply system including storage. Services Improvement Plan aims to extend services as per future demand along with quality upgrades.

Social audit is a key responsibility of GP/VWSC that ensures transparency in implementation and also helps in identification of gaps for better results. A VWSC generally comprises 6-12 members of which 50 per cent are women and rest of the members are elected from Gram Panchayat. Representation of different social communities and habitations is also ensured to avoid any disparity.

Management at Ground

India is the world's largest user of groundwater which serves 85 per cent of domestic water supply in rural areas, 45 per cent in urban areas, and over 60 per cent of irrigated agriculture. But, it is a finite source which is depleting fast due to overexploitation and poor recharge. The Central Groundwater Board estimates that about 17 per cent of groundwater blocks are over-exploited, while 5 per cent are at critical and 14 per cent are at semi-critical stage. The situation is particularly alarming in north-west, west and south-peninsular regions. This grim situation is posing threats to livelihoods, food security, and climate-driven migration. Hence, Government of India launched a comprehensive 'Atal Bhujal Yojana' (ABY) with the overall goal to improve groundwater management in critical areas. Being implemented since April, 2020, the scheme is operational in 8,565 Gram Panchayats of 80 districts in seven states, namely Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. ABY or Atal Jal is targeted at sustainable groundwater management, mainly through convergence among various on-going schemes with the active involvement of local communities and stakeholders. It also aims at bringing about behavioural change at the community level through awareness programs and capacity building. The scheme is promoting and motivating active participation of communities in various activities such as formation/strengthening of Water Users Associations, water budgeting, and preparation of Gram Panchayat wise water security plans and their implementation. The participation of women in water budgeting and planning has been kept at least 33 per cent in the Gram Panchayat level Water Users Associations. Community participation is also ensured in preparation of aquifer/area specific groundwater management plans. Public Interaction Programs are also organised at grassroot level for the benefit of stakeholders. So far, over 1,040 such programs have

been conducted across the country in which nearly 84,000 people have participated. If we successfully check the declining ground-water levels, it will lead to improvements in water regimes required for agriculture, domestic and industrial uses, thereby generating societal benefit. It will have positive impacts on livelihoods of women, small farmers and agricultural labourers.

As an activity of international cooperation, the World Bank has been collaborating with Government of India to enhance groundwater management in stressed areas. World Bank projects in peninsular India have recorded significant success by implementing the Participatory Groundwater Management approach. Under this approach, communities are empowered by providing governance rights alongwith community awareness and capacity development. Strengthening of local institutions for groundwater management is desired in many ways to make it sustainable and more productive in long-term. The World Bank also stressed the need to integrate supply side measures with demand side management for a sustainable solution. Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), launched in 2015-16, aims to accelerate supply-side and demand-side management by taking up very specific measures such as increasing on-farm water use efficiency, watershed development and Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of water bodies etc. It is an umbrella scheme, consisting of two major components implemented by Ministry of Jal Shakti, namely Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) and Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP). HKKP, in turn, consists of four sub-components – Command Area Development and Water Management (CAD&WM), Surface Minor Irrigation (SMI), RRR of water bodies and groundwater development. In addition to this, Per Drop More Crop (PDMC) component is being implemented by Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, whereas Watershed Development component is being implemented by Department of Land Resources. HKKP has a target (2021-26) to create 4.5 lakh hectare irrigation potential through SMI and RRR of water bodies including groundwater component. Further, CAD&WM component targets completion of the ongoing major/minor projects with coverage of cultivable command area of 30.23 lakh hectare (2021-22 to 2025-26). In on-field implementation of these components,

Villages attain water security, thanks to Gram Panchayats

Bakaram Jagir Gram Panchayat, Rangrareddy, Telangana

As per 2011 census, there are nearly 580 households in the village consisting of different social backgrounds and the population was 2,218 (50.18% males, 49.82% females). Bakaram Jagir started using improved source of water such as pipe connections since late 1990s with digging up of tubewells, which pumped water from ground. The first Over Head Tank (OHT) was constructed in 1998 in the central part of the village with a system of pumping water from ground, lifting it to the OHT, and then releasing water to households with supply channels. Considering the higher demand, an underground water tank (2005) and second OHT (2008) was constructed with additional borewells and supply channels. At present, there exist seven borewells and the extracted groundwater is stored in a considerably large underground water tank (1,58,000 litre capacity) for further supply to households. Besides the household connections, Gram Panchayat has established six Public Stand Posts in the village. The novel initiative of setting up of the RO plant is perhaps the most noteworthy achievement of the GP to provide safe potable water to the households. This treated water is accessible to everyone in the village with a minimal payment. It was during Gram Sabha meeting (2015) that the villagers raised the concern of safe drinking water facilities in the village. The proposal for installation of a water filter plant came up for discussion, but the heavy cost was a major constraint. Later, GP functionaries gathered financial support from Rotary Club of Hyderabad. Various aspects of its operation and maintenance were discussed and finalized in Gram Sabha meetings. The process of setting up the RO plant took almost one year from completion, and the plant became functional since January, 2016. GP has made provisions to provide filtered water to the Primary School and the Aanganwadi free of cost in the interest of children. Now, almost all households of the village are consuming safe and treated drinking water.

Pappla Gram Panchayat, Himchal Pradesh

Villagers of Pappla faced issues in managing their solid-liquid waste. The waste and wastewater from households flowed into streams leading to various health problems, soil contamination, mosquito breeding, foul smell and odour. In a village-level household survey (2020-21), households approached the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) for a solution to manage waste. Members of the VWSC, social health activist workers (ASHA), Aanganwadi workers and PRI members came together to draw a feasible plan. The Panchayat used funds under the MNREGA and constructed two new Haudis to collect and store rainwater. One is 21 m x 21 m and the other 7.5 m x 7.5 m. Both Haudis cater to houses in a cluster. Drinking water quality is tested once every three months in all the villages with the help of functional test kits provided under the Jal Jeevan Mission. Rainwater harvesting is now practiced consciously and substantially by the majority of households. Many water storage structures are constructed all over the village and pipes connect these structures to the houses for water supply. To manage waste and wastewater, the VWC encouraged the villagers to help build individual soak pits for managing greywater (2016-21). Nearly 95 percent of the households now have individual soak pits for greywater and toilets are connected to the septic tanks constructed with Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen funds. Some households convert their organic and animal waste into compost and use it for kitchen gardens. A small-scale plastic waste processing plant has also been set-up with collaborative effort. The plant is constructed on Panchayat land near Panchayat office. The Panchayat has channelised door to door waste collection from 700 households in five villages through the formally identified waste collector. Now, nearly 90 percent of households segregate waste into desired categories. Waste plastic is processed and then sold to junk dealers. The PWD is using plastic waste in construction of roads. Decision making process of Panchayat is inclusive with an equal role of women members. The Panchayat is role model for other villages of the area.

Panchayati Raj Institutions including VWSCs and Pani Panchayats play a critical role and ensure people's participation for better impact. District Irrigation Plans are the cornerstone for planning and implementation of PMKSY and its preparation is taken up as joint exercise of all participating departments. These plans are developed following intensive consultation process including Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is estimated that 1.25 lakh farmers have benefitted under different components of PMKSY since 2015.

CAD&WM mandates formation of Water User Associations (WUAs) for participatory irrigation management at local level. Under WUAs, farmers are involved in various aspects of irrigation systems, especially in distribution of water and collection of water charges. Under this program, Water User Associations are supported with one-time infrastructure grant of Rs. 3 lakh per WUA and functional grant of Rs. 1200 per hectare as part of non-structural interventions.

Association for Actions

Water Users' Association is a co-operative association of individual water users who wish to undertake irrigation related activities for their mutual benefit. A large number of WUAs have been registered in various States mainly to ensure an efficient and equitable supply and distribution of water along with maintenance of irrigation system on a scientific basis. WUAs play coordinative role in recovery of irrigation water rates from the beneficiary farmers. It also acts as an interface between the farmers and the main management set-up. Design and construction of new works including rehabilitation of canals and structures with provision of drinking water from canals are also undertaken by WUAs. WUAs co-operate with each other to form federations and take over large canal sub-systems. In a particular area, WUAs recommend best cropping patterns and package of agricultural practices for minimising water use and enhancing water efficiency. As an institution of farmer's interest, WUAs facilitate and help to arrange for other inputs for undertaking irrigated agriculture. WUAs also arrange farmer's training for taking up conjunctive water use including community lift irrigation. The WUA has a Managing Committee (MC) which looks after day-to-day functioning and monitors progress with identification of

bottlenecks. Each MC has a President, who is supported by 4 to 10 elected members. As per WUA Act all water users of an irrigation scheme are its members and voting rights reside with members who have been registered as owners or tenants in the record. To ensure the success of WUAs, State Governments are liable to create an enabling environment through policy resolutions, specific programs and activities promoted or sponsored by Government. User-friendly legal and administrative provisions and procedures may be laid to protect interests of farmers. State Governments should revive old and traditional systems of irrigation to make them operational atleast up to a minimum level. NGOs and local communities may be involved in such efforts to develop partnership. Various States have enacted their own Acts and Rules for statutory backing to WUAs. Generally such legislations cover equity, demand management, rights of landless, community participation and sustainability of the resource.

Government of India in partnership with State Governments is implementing an ambitious Jal Jeevan Mission – Her Ghar Jal with the vision to provide tap water supply to every rural household of the country by 2024. The major responsibility of its implementation lies with the States, while Government of India provides technical and financial assistance. State and District Action Plans are prepared by respective Water and Sanitation Mission, while water budget is framed as part of Village Action Plan by Gram Panchayat. Mission is based on community approach to water, and includes IEC (Information, Education and Communication) as a key component of the Mission. The JMM looks to create a jan andolan for water, thereby making it a priority for everyone.

To ensure sustainability in water resource, especially for local water resources such as groundwater and local ponds, Panchayats should not only act as service provider, but also as a concerned observer and monitor. Appropriate planning supported by people's participation is imperative to maintain the quality and availability of water resource in future. People's participation creates awareness and a sense of ownership which drives the water project towards success and significant societal impacts. ■



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Human Development through Panchayati Raj Institution

Debabrata Samanta

The introduction of Panchayati Raj Institution in India has created spaces for the participation of rural people in governance. In the changing paradigm of rural development strategy, the PRI is expected to not only provide services to improve the well-being of people, they are also expected to get engaged in making people aware of climate change and disaster preparedness.

In last few decades, new modes of decentralised governance like 'democratic decentralisation', 'participatory development', and 'civil society' have gained immense importance in the development paradigm. While, there were only 39 countries in 1974, which had electoral democratic governance, however, during 1970 to 2014 around 123 countries, including Philippines, Bolivia, Tanzania, Uganda and India have amended their legislations towards decentralised governance. The term decentralisation implies transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the Central Government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organisations and/or the private sector. There are three basic types of decentralisation, namely (i) Political Decentralisation, (ii) Administrative Decentralisation and (iii) Financial Decentralisation; apart, there is Economic or Market Decentralisation. In India, though the existence of decentralised governance can be traced back in ancient time, post-independence, the legal framework was laid through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992. Through 73rd Constitutional Amendment the three-tier Panchayat system has been made a legal compulsion in rural areas. It is expected that the administrative and political devolution to make the system more pro-poor and conducive for the wellbeing of rural population.

Panchayat System in India: A Historical Perspective

India has adopted decentralised and participatory governance system since the inception of the five year plans. The effort to promote

decentralised governance in rural areas is practiced by the government through the promotion and strengthening of the Panchayati Raj system. The need for Panchayati Raj system is traced as far back as the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta committee in 1957. The committee recommended a three-tier Panchayat system at district, block and village levels. The National Development Council approved the recommendations of the Mehta Committee in January 1958 and suggested that each state should implement this as best suited to its own particular conditions. The second plan document acknowledged the necessity of development of democratic institutions and emphasised upon 'comprehensive village planning' for efficient distribution of state benefit to weaker sections of society. The Dantwala Committee on Block Planning, formed in 1978, prescribed integration of block-level plans with district plans. Ashok Mehta Committee in 1978 recommended political decentralisation, and L.M Singhvi Committee, recommended the involvement of Panchayati Raj institutions in basic planning and implementation of development projects and consider Panchayati Raj Institutions as Institute of Self Governance to facilitate the participation of the people in the process of planning and development (Datta & Sodhi, 2020). Although these recommendations were considered as the stepping stone of the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) in India, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, in 1992, have formalised such an institution by giving PRI the constitutional provision to constitute three-tier panchayat system in each state as well as emerge as an institute of self-governance. This Constitutional Amendment mandate setting up

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three tier PRI system in rural areas, holding of election in regular interval, and institutionalising participation of citizen in the planning process. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has also created 11th Schedule in which 29 subjects have been specified to be placed under the purview of PRI. These subjects are related to service delivery, infrastructure development and the development of livelihood for rural people. PRIs, under the law, are required to prepare plans for economic development and social justice for their areas, and also implement them.

Panchayati Raj Institution in India

Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) is a three-tiered structure in India. PRIs include Gram Panchayats (village level), Mandal Parishad or Block Samiti or Panchayat Samiti (Block level), and Zila Parishad (district level).

- (i) Zila Parishad (ZP) or district panchayat: Each district has one Zila Parishad or district panchayat.
- (ii) Block Panchayat (BP) or Panchayat Samitis: Each block in the said district has one block panchayat.
- (iii) Gram Panchayat (GP): A Gram, as defined by law, may consist of a single village or a cluster of adjoining villages. It is divided into a minimum of five constituencies (again depending on the number of voters the Gram is having). From each of these constituencies, one member is elected. Body of these elected members is called the Gram Panchayat. The size of the GP's vary widely from state to state.

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendments, these bodies have been granted greater powers and additional financial resources to promote local economic and social development. The Article 243ZD(1) recommended for the constitution of the District Planning Committee at the district level to integrate plans prepared by panchayats and municipalities and to prepare draft development plan for the district.

Implication of Panchayati Raj Institution and Decentralised Governance

Decentralisation, or decentralising

governance, as referred by UNDP (United Nation Development Programme, 1997) as the restructuring or reorganisation of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiary. This increases the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels. It is expected to contribute to key elements of good governance, such as increasing people's opportunities for participation in economic, social and political decisions; assisting in developing people's capacities; and enhancing government responsiveness, transparency, and accountability, as well as delivery of goods and services to people for their wellbeing and contribute to human development.

Dreze & Sen (Dreze & Sen, 1995) and Webster (Webster, 1992) argued that the poor functioning of the local public services in India relates to the centralised and non-participatory nature of their management. Decentralised governance system receive utmost importance in different kinds of service deliveries. It is also found that Devolving administrative authority to local governments improves public service delivery because of better information availability, better knowledge of citizens' preferences or better monitoring capacity at the local level (World Bank, 2004; Bardhan & Mookherjee., 2006). In India, the PRI system is a buoyant example of Administrative, Political and Fiscal decentralisation at rural areas of the country. The three-tier administrative structure of the PRI system is expected to reach the grass root level people and ensure their participation in village-level planning. The spaces like 'Ward Sabha' and 'Gram Sabha' have been created to ensure the participation of people in village planning. In the context of political decentralisation, the members from each village constituency, for respective local bodies are to be elected by the people through secret voting, to be conducted in the regular intervals, generally after every five years. The representation of women and weaker sections has been ensured through the reservation of seats in each tier of PRI. For fiscal decentralisation, states were to establish the State Finance Commissions to provide recommendations on revenue-sharing

arrangements and grants to these local government institutions (Chaudhary & Iyer, 2022).

Role of Panchayat in Human Development

Post 73rd Constitutional Amendment, most of the states, either prepared or amended the Panchayat Act accordingly, to facilitate the devolution of fund, function and functionaries at three tiers of panchayat and given them responsibilities for developing plan for local level development and implement it. The 29 subjects under 11th Schedule are instrumental to guide in this process. These 29 subjects includes Agriculture, land improvement, irrigation and water management, animal husbandry, fisheries, social forestry, minor forest production, small scale industries, khadi and cottage, rural housing, cultural activities, market and fairs, sanitation and health, women and child development, family welfare, social welfare, public distribution system, drinking water, fuel and fodder, road and communication, electrification, non-conventional energy, poverty alleviation programme, education, vocational training, non-formal education, libraries, and community asset. The 29 subjects have direct impact on infrastructure development, livelihood development, and service delivery in rural areas. Most of these subjects have direct impact on human development of people in rural areas.

The United Nations Development Programme defined Human Development, as "the process of enlarging people's choices", said choices allowing them to "lead a long and healthy life, to be educated, to enjoy a decent standard of living", as well as "political freedom, other guaranteed human rights and various ingredients of self-respect. The Central idea of Human Development concept is the Capability Approach, which is defined by Amartya Sen as the various combinations of functioning (Being and doing) that the person can achieve. Since 1990, by the publication of the first Human Development Report of United Nation Development Programme, income, education and health have been identified as three important dimensions of human development.

At rural level, the PRI system is expected to work as an institute of self-governance and play a crucial role in planning, implementation, and monitoring of different programmes and initiatives

related to education, health, and service delivery. It is argued that, quality of governance has direct impact on economic growth, poverty alleviation and nutrition. Public provision of service delivery at the local level help the poor to supplement nutrition intake and beat the vicious circle of under nourishment, under employment and poverty (Dasgupta & Ray, 1986). Over the last few decades, it has been found, the efficient delivery of targeted public services has the potential to reduce economic inequalities which have been rising in rapidly growing economies, such as China and India (Datt, Ravallion, & Murgai, 2016).

Though the proportion of rural population in India shows a decreasing trend, however, as per the World Bank data, around 65 per cent of the total population in India lives in rural areas. Rural populations, at large, in India are socio-economically vulnerable due to their dependence on agriculture and related activities for their livelihood. Lack of employment opportunities and incidence of poverty also force rural populations to engage in jobs below their capacity. Rural development schemes like National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) are programmed to enhance livelihood opportunities through self and wage employment and remove poverty through participatory approaches. In rural areas a large number of services are served with active engagement of PRI system. In India, the PRI system not only engages in implementation of different schemes related to livelihood enhancement and service delivery, they also ensure people's participation in the process. There are cross-country evidences of positive impact of participation on the performance of public works projects. The role of PRI became crucial in lowering the cost of service delivery interventions and produces the outcome according to the need of the community (Hoddinott, Adato, Besley, & Haddad, 1999; Isham & Kähkönen, 1999). A study (Besley, Rao, & Pande, 2005) of over 522 villages in four south Indian states establishes that gram sabha meetings are used by some of the most disadvantaged groups in the villages – landless, illiterate and scheduled caste (SC)/scheduled tribe (ST) – as a forum to influence policies in their favour. The study found that holding such meetings under

PRI system improves the targeting of resources towards the needy. Quite similar case is observed in a study on West Bengal, which ascertains that in the gram sansad meetings, SC and ST are the largest categories to participate in the same. Among those, who refrain from participating are the ones, who do not visualise any immediate benefit from gram sansad meetings (Ghatak & Ghatak, 2002). At the grassroot level in rural areas, PRI play significant roles in creating conducive environment for collective action in respect to public services. These, in turn, make people aware and ensure deliberations over decision-making process and monitoring over services. For example, in case of education, especially elementary education, the gram panchayat and village education committees found to play an instrumental role in monitoring and improving services of education in villages of India (Banerjee, Banerji, Duflo, Glennerste, & Khemani, 2006).

Role of Panchayat in Education: A Case of Madhya Pradesh

Since 1994 Madhya Pradesh has made continuous efforts to decentralise the management of school education to local level and to empower the community to make education responsive to the people's needs. The responsibility of managing school education (from classes I-XII) was transferred to three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1996. Some structural arrangement made to strengthen the management and delivery system. Standing Committees on Education (Shiksha Sthayi Samitis) of PRIs at district panchayat and block panchayat and Village Education Committee at Gram Panchayat level were created for looking after management of school education. In 2002, the Parent-Teachers Associations (PTAs) were established as statutory body at school level with administrative and financial powers given to these bodies. Gram Sabhas have been empowered with transfer of functions related to school management. Studies (Tyagi, 2012) found that there was phenomenal growth in enrolment of children in the age group 6-14, and narrowed down the gap of non-enrolled children between 2003-04 to 2006-07. The enrolment of children recorded 30.6 per cent growth at primary stage, and 19.3 per cent, at upper primary stage. Enrolment of

girls at the primary stage increased from 46.6 per cent in 2003-04 to 47.5 per cent in 2006-07. The participation of disabled children also made little progress during 2003-04 to 2006-07. Only progress of enrolment of disadvantaged groups has decreased during this period. Though the structural reform in transferring power to PRI and community yield good result, however it was not free from challenges. It has been found that while Panchayati Raj Institutions are generally entrusted with the responsibility of recruitment, transfer and decision-making, they face inadequacy of capacity-building programmes for them; while participation of the local community in school management is increased to a great extent, a good number of children still remain out-of-school; and that there is hardly interface between Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Parent Teacher Associations at school level. Coordination between Panchayati Raj Institutions and various bodies of educational administration at district, block and habitation levels has also found to be a major concern (Tyagi, 2012).

Role of Panchayat in Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management

There is paradigm shift in rural development strategies in near past. The future strategies need to be understood as a continuum of urbanised and globalised systems, especially in the context of the problem of climate change. Since, the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to burning, fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas. Burning fossil fuels generates greenhouse gas emissions that act like a blanket wrapped around the Earth, trapping the sun's heat and raising temperatures. This affect rainfall patterns, brings more intense rainfall and associated flooding, as well as more intense drought in many regions. Rural people are highly dependent on natural resources and ecosystem services and highly vulnerable to climate change including the effects of rainfall, water availability, hydrological regime, extreme weather events, and natural disaster. Climate change negatively impacts livelihood security and presents a livelihood disturbance, especially when adaptive mechanisms are limited. With the changing rural ecosystem, the rural policies need to be justified to cater the needs of material aspects (food production

etc.) ecosystem services (water, biodiversity, clean air etc.) and contribution of rural areas to the mitigation of climate change. The active commitment and leadership of local government institutions, namely panchayat in rural areas are important for the implementation of any local disaster risk reduction programme. Leadership of the PRI system is crucial for political momentum and support among external stakeholders. In this regard, the PRI is expected to play a pivotal role, in one hand they are the immediate providers of public services, and the other they are naturally situated amongst citizens to play an instrumental role in building awareness. The PRI can also play a crucial role in community training related to climate change and disaster preparedness. It is also argued that community preparedness sometimes appeared as effective compared to costly public investment in disaster risk reduction (Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017).

Conclusion

In last few decades, world over, there is a shift in governance structure towards more decentralised one. India also has legally adopted decentralised governance for rural areas through 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992. This amendment made legal compulsion of establishing three-tier PRI system in rural areas. The PRI system has brought governance structure to grass root level at rural areas and created space for participation of people in planning, monitoring and evaluation of different schemes and service delivery programmes, which have direct impact on human development. World-wide as well as in India, there are evidences that, introduction of PRI system has brought the scope to influence the service delivery as per the need of the people as well as, the quality of service delivery has improved. In the current context, the rural development strategies are experiencing transformation by incorporating need for plan to reduce impact of climate change. The PRI system is expected plays pivotal role in this regard. In one hand they are the immediate providers of public services, and on the other, they are naturally situated amongst citizens to play an instrumental role in building awareness related to climate change and disaster preparedness. ■

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Universal Health Coverage with Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres

Dr. Manisha Verma

Ayushman Bharat- Health and Wellness Centers are envisaged to deliver an expanded range of services to address the primary health care needs of beneficiaries thereby expanding access and universality of healthcare services being provided close to the community. Such care will be provided/ complemented through outreach services, mobile medical units, camps, home and community-based care.

World Health Organisation (WHO) defines Universal Health Coverage (UHC) as 'All people having access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. It covers the full continuum of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. The focus of UHC is on preventing diseases and towards overall health and wellbeing. In India too, the focus is shifting from clinical and curative health to the one that advocates and promotes preventive and promotive health encompassing the comprehensive gamut of physical and mental health.

How did this change come about? Let us move a few years back and track the journey. In 2017, the National Health Policy was unveiled based on recommendations of the Task Force for Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC). The policy positions primary healthcare to be comprehensive and universal. It envisages providing larger package of assured comprehensive primary health care through 'Health and Wellness Centers' and denotes important change from very selective to comprehensive primary health care package which includes geriatric health care, palliative care and rehabilitative care services. The new policy laid the foundation for establishment of Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWC).

In February 2018, Government of India announced the creation of 1,50,000 Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) by transforming existing Sub Centres and Primary Health Centres into Ayushman Bharat- Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs). These would deliver Comprehensive

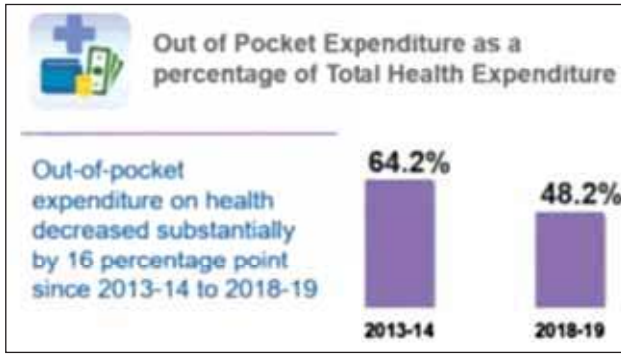
Primary Health Care (CPHC) closer to the homes of people, covering both maternal and child health services along with non-communicable diseases, provisioning of free essential drugs and diagnostic services. The first HWC was inaugurated on 14th April 2018 by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in Chattisgarh.

Hon. Prime Minister had said- "Health and Wellness Centres will in a way work as family doctors for the poor. Earlier, there used to be a family doctor in middle class and upper class families. These Wellness Centres will now become the extension of your families. These will be associated with your day to day lives."

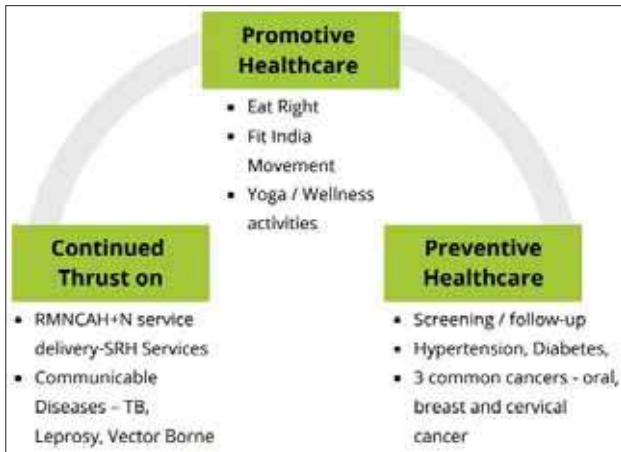
Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centers are envisaged to deliver an expanded range of services to address the primary health care needs of beneficiaries thereby expanding access and universality of healthcare services being provided close to the community. Such care will be provided/ complemented through outreach services, mobile medical units, camps, home and community-based care. This represents a paradigm shift as it views health holistically and paves the way for India's aims of universal health coverage (UHC). It also shifts the focus towards preventive and promotive healthcare with collective responsibility. As per National Health Accounts (NHA), a little more than 48 per cent of the Total Health Expenditure (THE) is on out-of-pocket-expenditure (OOPE). While there has been an appreciable reduction of OOPE over the years, it still subjects the vulnerable masses to

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catastrophic healthcare burden.

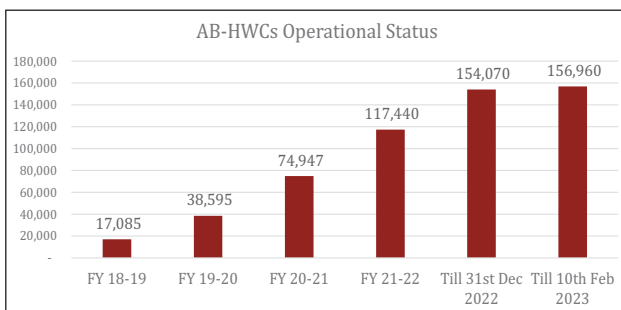


One of the aims of AB-HWCs is to significantly reduce OOPE and financial hardship through affordable, accessible and quality healthcare closer to the communities.



Healthcare services at AB-HWCs

AB-HWCs reflect multiple reforms in the health sector spanning across various aspects such as service delivery, human resources, financing, access to essential medicines and diagnostics, community participation coupled with ownership and governance. As on 10th February 2023, 1,56,960 AB-HWCs centres are operational across States and UTs.

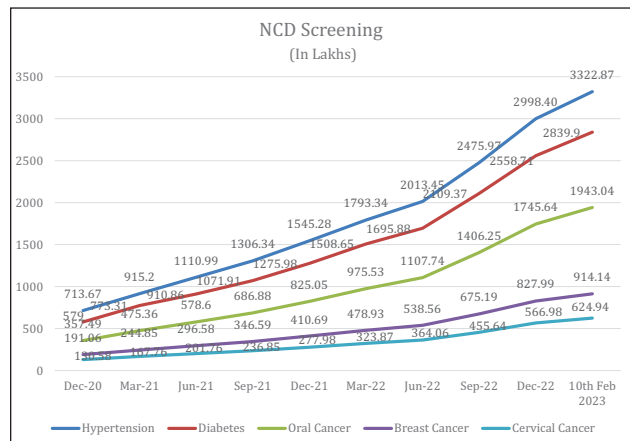


(Data Source- AB-HWC Portal as on 10th Feb 2023)

Fig. 1: AB-HWC Operational status achievement

Service Packages

The service packages made available at AB-HWCs have been expanded to include care in pregnancy and child birth, neo-natal and infant health care services, childhood and adolescent health care services, family planning, contraceptive services and other reproductive health care services. They also include management of common communicable disease and out-patient care for acute simple illness and minor ailments, screening, prevention and management of non-communicable diseases and chronic communicable diseases like Tuberculosis and Leprosy.



(Data Source- AB-HWC Portal as on 10th Feb 2023)

Fig. 2: Progress of NCD Screening

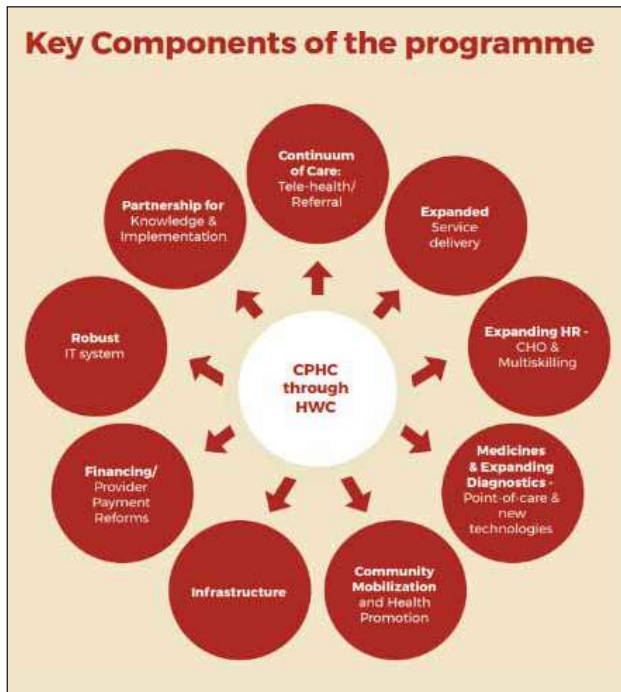
The services being added in an incremental manner are basic oral health care, care for common ophthalmic and ENT problem, screening and basic management of mental health ailments, elderly and palliative health care services and emergency medical services including burns and trauma.

With focus on healthy lifestyle to beat non-communicable diseases, various activities are taken up at HWCs. Recently on 14th February, Health Melas were organised at all 1.56 lakh HWCs across the states and UTs to shine focus on healthy lifestyle. Cycling rallies were the prominent feature. Each state observed this day through various health related activities.

Key Components

The fundamental pillars underlying AB-HWCs include continuum of care from primary to secondary and tertiary levels through the referral mechanism and use of telemedicine technology in

addition to expanded range of health care services, human resources and their training/multi-skilling, expanded ranges of medicines and diagnostic equipment, infrastructure to deliver CPHC services and health promotion and community mobilisation activities. Sufficient funds, robust IT system to meet the needs of all the stakeholders and strong partnership and networks for sharing knowledge and disseminating information also form an integral part of their effectiveness.



Key elements of HWCs

Community Engagement

An essential part of AB-HWC is healthcare workers working closely with the communities. The team enable empowerment of individuals, families and communities with knowledge and skills to take responsibility for their own health. Preventive and promotive healthcare being essential aspects of wellness, AB-HWCs also focus on improving health literacy through Inter Personal Communication, and media including social media, for promotion of healthy lifestyles – diet, yoga, exercise, tobacco cessation, and self-care for those with chronic disease conditions. Institutional structures such as Jan Arogya Samitis, with representation from the local bodies and Panchayats, Self Help Groups and patients, enable community ownership and accountability of AB-HWC teams.

Access to Free Essential Medicines and Diagnostic Services

The AB-HWCs serve as the hub for dispensing medicines at the PHC. These not only ensure the uninterrupted availability of medicines to ensure adherence and continuation of care but also reduce any patient hardship by providing medicines closer to their homes. The number of essential medicines at PHC-AB-HWCs has been increased to 171 and number of essential diagnostic services to 63. While at the SHC-AB-HWCs, these have been increased to 105 essential medicines and 14 essential diagnostic services.

Robust IT Systems

The IT system includes the provision of a smart phone to the ASHA and a tablet to the Multipurpose Worker and CHO. This has enabled registration of all individuals' record of services and outcomes, increasing the quality of care and accountability. The patient can be reached at the home/community level for treatment adherence and follow-up measurements of vital parameters.



Continuum of Care under Ayushman Bharat

Teleconsultation services

The AB-HWCs provide teleconsultation services, whereby every level of service provider from CHO at Sub Health Center-HWCs to Medical Officer at Primary Health Centres-HWC is able to access higher level of consultation, including with specialists in secondary and tertiary centres so that physical travel by patients can be minimised, reducing costs and any potential hardship.

Recently, tele-consultations crossed the ten crore mark on e-sanjeevani. In a tweet, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had lauded this achievement. "10,00,00,000 tele-consultations is a remarkable feat. I laud all those doctors who are at the forefront of building a strong digital health eco-system in India." Prime Minister Modi had said.



Health and Wellness Ambassadors and Messengers

AB-HWCs also include school health activities. Teachers in every school are being trained to serve as Health and Wellness Ambassadors; and students as messengers. Since adolescence is the time when risk taking behaviours generally set in, the initiative will enable creating healthy habits in school leading to early action and encouragement to adopt healthy behaviours at young age, leading to prevention of chronic diseases later in life.



AB-HWC providing screening facility

Why are AB-HWCs seen as game changers?

Why are AB-HWCs viewed as game changers in primary healthcare? The answer lies in the available evidence. Before the establishment of

AB-HWC, selective primary health care was largely limited to Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) and communicable diseases, which was addressing only 20 per cent of the health care needs. But after the introduction of comprehensive primary health care, an expanded range of health services has been included to include chronic disease conditions and non-communicable diseases. Secondly, earlier primary level of health care facilities did not serve gate keeping functions, leading to crowded secondary level health care facilities. The AB-HWCs facilitate resolution of more cases at primary level thereby helping to reduce overcrowding at secondary and tertiary level facilities.

Before the operationlisation of AB-HWCs, people visiting the peripheral health facilities had none or limited access to telehealth. AB-HWCs has brought about a wide network and referral linkages through teleconsultation/telemedicine platforms such as e-Sanjeevani. Reporting and documentation was earlier being done manually which could lead to duplication of records, overburdened staff, especially frontline workers. The IT platform of AB-HWC offers standardised digital health records, establishment of a seamless flow of information across all levels of care and an assured continuum of care.

Furthermore, there was limited focus on wellness component at primary health care facilities. Now, wellness activities including Yoga are mainstreamed into the health care delivery system and active engagement of Yoga practitioners has been ensured at AB-HWCs.

Conclusion

Primary healthcare is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of an effective and sustainable health system for achieving universal health coverage, which is viewed as the centerpiece of SDG-3. It signifies that all people should have access to quality health services, when in need, without facing any financial hardship. The idea of revamping the health system at the grassroots through the AB-HWCs has the potential to play a major role in reduction of morbidity and mortality burden due to many chronic and non-communicable disease, promote healthier lifestyle, reduce out-of-pocket expenditure of the community which is usually incurred at the district/state level hospitals and also reduce the patient load at the district and state level hospitals. They, therefore, form an integral cog in the wheel of Universal Health Coverage. ■



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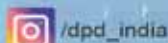
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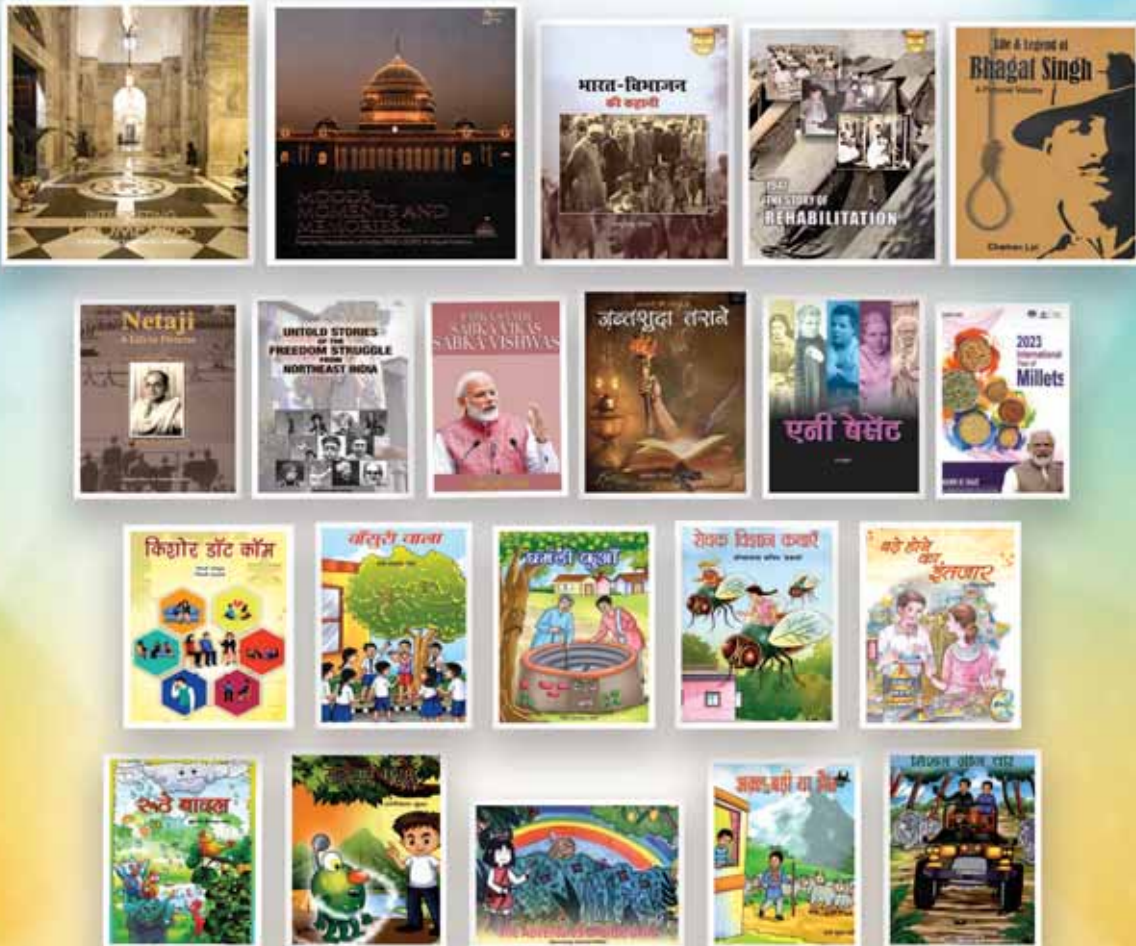


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